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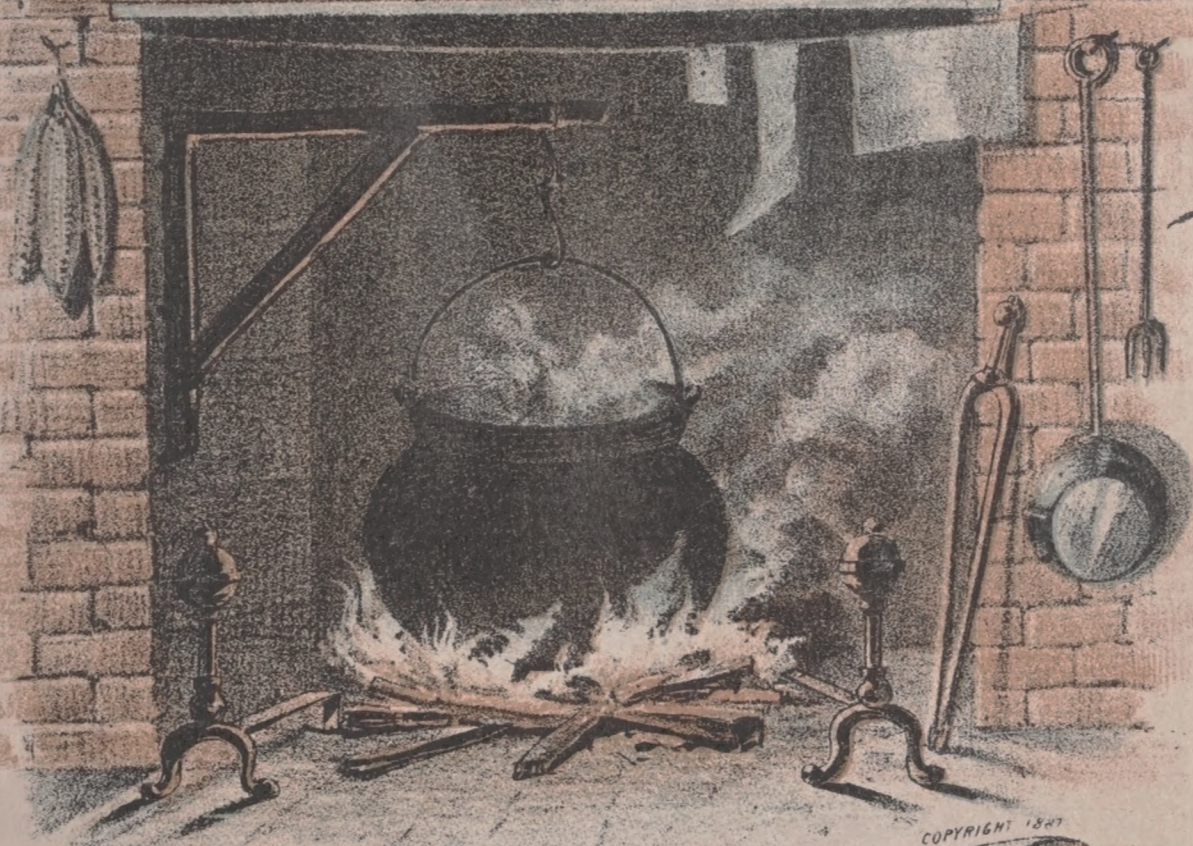
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



The Bad Boy and His Sister.

By BENJAMIN BROADAXE.



*FIRESIDE
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
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“ ‘ You heah ? ’ he cried ; ‘ you heah ? ’ roared Smalltrash. ” —
Page 175.

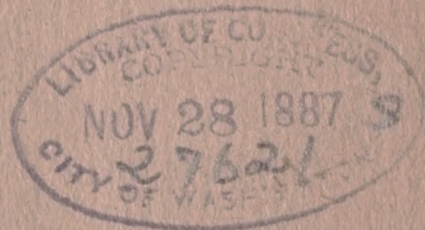
THE BAD BOY

AND

HIS SISTER.

BY BENJAMIN BROADAXE.

*owned by John R.
Musick.*



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57 ROSE STREET, NEW YORK.

79 WABASH AVENUE, CHICAGO.

THE BAD BOY AND HIS SISTER.

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BY BENJAMIN BROADAXE.

CHAPTER I.

HE PLAYS A MEAN TRICK ON HIS PA.

“SUSAN,—Susan, what’re we to do? I do believe that boy’ll be the death o’ me?”

“What’s he bin doin’ now, Abram?”

“Doin’, what is ’t he aint bin doin’?” and the irate father mopped his florid complexion with his shirt sleeve. Abram Mullen did not look like a happy man at that moment, as he wiped his face with his shirt sleeve and wiggled a pair of bruised and bleeding fingers in the air, while his wife got soft linen cloths to tie them up.

“What’s Asa bin doin’ now, Abram?” she again asked, cutting out a piece of goods she had taken from the bureau drawer.

“Doin’,—he’s allers up to some mischief. I don’t see how I kin stand him any longer.”

Mrs. Mullen was a patient body and allowed her husband to go on until he was ready to tell her what new outrage had been perpetrated by their son and hopeful heir.

"I could stand his paintin' a nigger on the barn door an' almost skeerin' me to death, his puttin' a burr under the saddle, or turnin' the preacher's saddle hind part before, so when he got on in the night he couldent find his hosses head; his puttin' the tictac under the bed-room winder, harnessin' the cow to the buggy, makin' old Bally kick up when I was startin' to town, tyin' grass across the path I had to go to the field, tyin' the hitch rein to my gallus when I was stoopin' to tie my shoe and then skeerin' the hoss; all them little things is nuthin'; but when he sets a steel trap in the corn crib, in the very crack where I allers put my hand to git corn, to ketch an otter, it's too much—I can't stand it."

The wife and mother sympathised with the afflicted man and did everything in her power to console him, but she had long regarded Asa as a hopeless case. At last with a sigh which was deep from the heart, she said:

"Well, Abram, what're we goin' to do? 'Taint no use to beat him."

"Beat 'im, no. I've peeled the hide off'n that boy a dozen times, but it don't never do any good. I don't know what to do."

Mr. Mullen sat down upon a chair, his brow clouded and perplexed. "I've jest got to the end o' my row," he sighed. Doubtless by this figurative speech he meant to imply that he had got to his wit's end. He nursed his fingers, which his good wife had bound up in a mush poultice, and mused: "I guess this'll cut me out from goin' to the log rollin'. No 'ns got any business thar with hands badly mashed as mine."

"You haint got much business thar anyway, old man," said Mrs. Mullen quickly. "You're a deekin, an' deekins orter keep away from sich places."

"Now, Susan, jest listen to you, as if any harm could come o' a log rollin'. Thar aint been a log rollin' in this part o' Kaintucky fur yeers that I ain't been to."

"I know it, an' ye'd been better away."

Abram Mullen sighed and gazed out from the old-fashioned window of his old-fashioned Kentucky farm-house. The scenery was picturesque. Green glades, hollows and ridges were in the foreground, relieved by blue hills and mountains in the background. He was not much of a man to be in the house. In fact Abram Mullen had passed most of his life in open air. His strong arm had felled the trees and broke the soil which made his farm. He had prided himself on his strength and activity for many years.

"I dun no when thar was a log rollin' without me," he sighed as he watched the busy bees humming drowsily about their gums. "Thar comes Jake, that lazy nigger on a run, wonder what he wants now."

A tall, shambling negro, wearing trowsers and shirt much too loose for him, and seeming ill-proportioned in every way, came up the hill from the spring at a shambling run.

"'Tis Jake; somethin's happened," said Mrs. Mullen in some alarm.

Mr. Mullen was on his feet in a moment, and running to the door bawled out before the negro was nearer to the house than fifty yards :

"Jake, Jake, what's the matter?"

"Oh master—master," cried Jake, gesticulating wildly with his arms, "little Asa am a dyin."

"What? good heaven, Susan! git the camp-fire and come. Where is he, Jake, run?"

Down the hill went Jake blowing like a porpoise before a storm, and Mr. Mullen, all resentment against his refractory son gone, running after him. Mr. Mullen was an active man for one of fifty, and thought it would accelerate his speed more by jumping the yard fence than opening the gate, so over he went, alighting on his nose. But Asa, his beloved Asa, was dying, and he scrambled to his feet. In the meanwhile

the kind-hearted mother ran to the kitchen, screamed for Aunt Sukey and Jude, the colored women, to get the "camp-fire bottle." In too great haste to wait on them, she sprang at the cupboard. At the first dive she made, she got the pepper box, and the top having been carelessly left off, a fact which she in her haste did not observe, she upset that useful article of the culinary department, and received a part of the contents in her eyes. But what mother will halt a moment on account of pepper in her eyes, when her child is dying.

"The camp-fire, the camp-fire," she screamed, and when Jude ran in, found the camphor bottle for her "missus," and put it in her hand, she just brushed some of the pepper from her eyes and face with her apron, and ran with all speed, blinded as she was, against the gate post, which struck her like a run-away team, and sent her sprawling on the ground. In the meanwhile Mr. Mullen who had caught up with Jake, asked that badly excited individual what was the matter with Asa.

"Hung hissef," the negro cried.

"Suicided! oh, lordy, I driv him to it," groaned the penitent father. "It was jest out o' fear o' another wallupin that he done it——"

The sentence was not finished, for the father in his speed did not notice the knot in the grass

across the path, and his boot striking it with a twenty-five horse power sent him sprawling upon the ground. He would have laid there much longer than he did, had he not remembered that his boy was hanging, perhaps dead, on a tree down by the spring. He got up and limped down to the foot of the hill, where he saw a sandy-headed boy about fourteen years old, with nose slightly inclined to turn up, and a few freckles sprinkled about over his face, mending a broken rope.

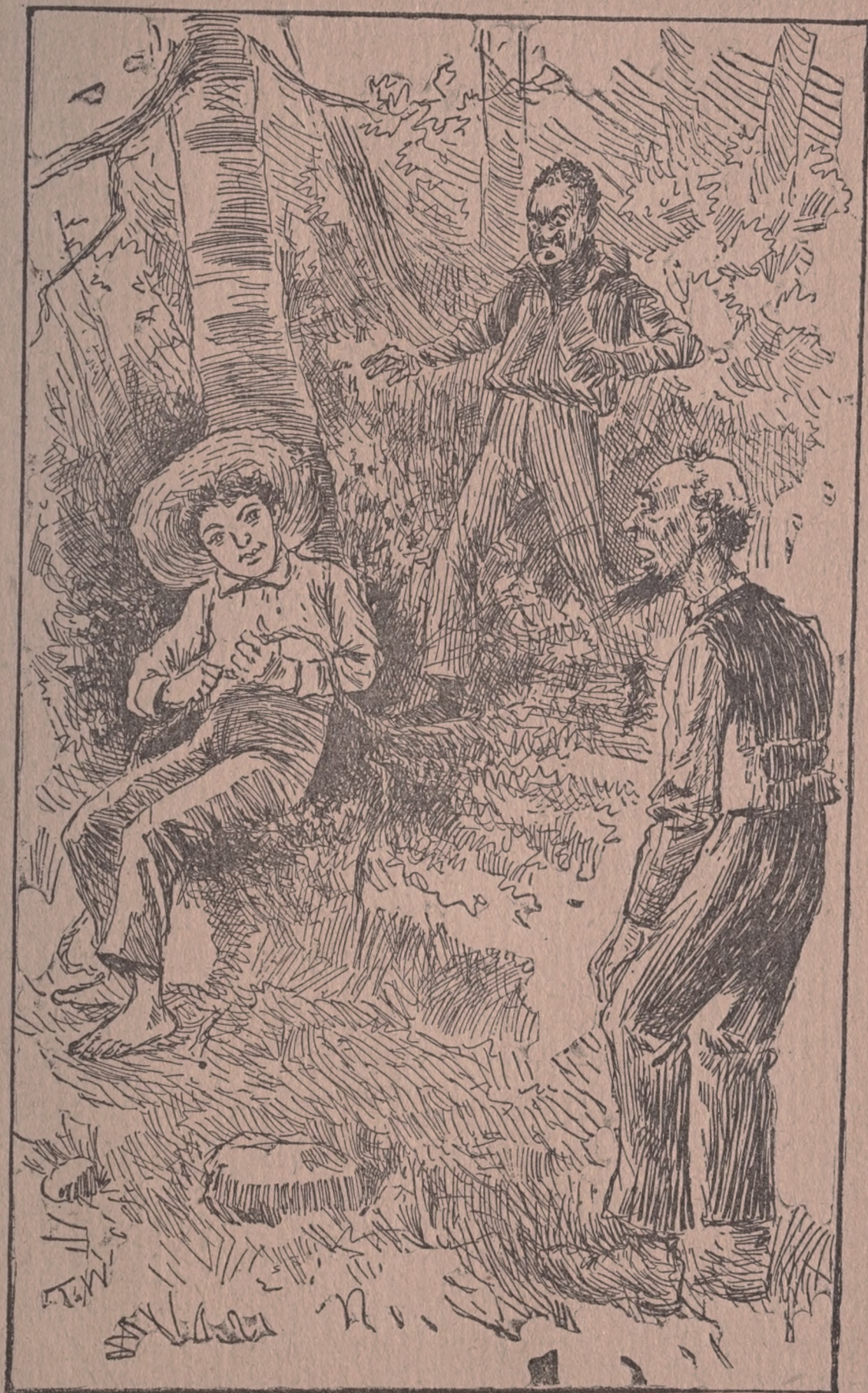
"Asa, Asa, my darlin' boy, what's the matter with you?" cried the agonized father.

"Nuthin'," Asa answered innocently, as he turned his mischievous blue eyes on his father.

"Did'nt you hang yerself?"

"Naw. I jist skeered that nigger by hanging myself by the chin in that loop, but the rope broke that's all."

It is useless to say that Mr. Mullen was much lamer going back to the house than coming down the hill. He found his wife feeling her way among the trees and calling on some one to lead her to her dying boy. He took her home and both were laid up for a day or two. Asa was very sorry, and said that he didn't intend to hurt anybody, and wondered why they should be makin' such a "fuss about him skin-nin' cats in a rope."



"Asa, Asa, my darlin' boy, what's the matter with you."—
Page 10.

"Skinnin' cats," cried Mr. Mullen, nursing his injured ankle and hand alternately. "What d'ye mean a skinnin' my hand by settin' a steel trap in the corn crib?"

"I thought I'd ketch a otter."

"A otter, ye idiot; d'ye think otters are found in cribs?"

"I heerd 'em say otters would go in steel traps, and didn't know it made any difference where ye sot 'em."

Mr. Mullen was a patient man, but this he could not endure. Asa sat with his frowsled hair pushed back from his broad forehead, when his father seized him by the neck, shook him a moment, and hurled him from the door.

Asa was not one to harbor malice or revenge. He forgave his father almost immediately, and in five minutes after was watching a pair of cats enjoying each other's society with their tails tied together and hung over a clothes line.

Asa was a very interesting boy. He usually kept people and animals about him interested. It was useless for his parents and sister, who was a grown young lady, to expostulate with him. He was not a bad-hearted boy. He was simply mischievous. Sometimes when one of his pranks had caused very much pain and suffering he even wept, especially after his father had almost taken the skin off his back.

The day of the log rolling Mr. Mullen could not go. "It's too bad Susan," he said. "I aint missed one afore for years. A Kaintucky log rollin' I don't think 'ud seem natural without me." His ire was rising against his son for depriving him of this privilege, when he chanced to glance out in the yard, and saw his dear little boy, whom he loved so well, gamboling on the green sward with "Billy," the pet ram, and thought he could never have it in his heart to punish him. Asa and the pet ram were special friends and were almost always together. They had many a frolic. Sometimes Billy got in a square hit from both shoulders at once, and sent Asa whirling head over heels, but a boy never gets hurt bad when having fun. He had learned to manage Billy pretty well. He might have learned it from some antiquated Indian Scout who had from cover of a tree, drawn the fire of the enemy by exposing his cap. At any rate Asa had given Billy many a surprise by shaking his cap at him, and then suddenly withdrawing it just as Billy came with a stiffened neck, and horns and head presented, to knock the hateful cap to Jericho.

It was Sunday morning. One of those beautiful days in June when all the world seems at peace. Grass was growing green all over the hills, and brilliant-hued flowers painted many a glorious picture on nature's canvas. The blue

sky was as clear as the conscience of the sinless. A strange, happy repose seemed to have fallen over the earth. A quiet,—a hush in nature—seemed to prevail everywhere, teaching all that it was the glorious Sabbath. The tinkling bells and drowsy hum of bees seemed only to lull one to repose. The sun was not more than an hour high but the Mullen family had disposed of their breakfast, the house had been made tidy, and all were assembled in the best room for prayers. Father Mullen was a devout man ; yet with his incorrigible boy, his faith was frequently shaken. Asa, of course, kneeled with his father, mother and sister in the morning service. The door was open and the mild summer sun streamed in. Asa was near the door, and we shall not say that he tried to be very devout, but somehow his young restless spirit got tired of that long prayer. Father Mullen always prayed a long time, and Asa longed to be romping over the hills. He was kneeling over a rude hickory bottom chair, when a fly bit him on his bare foot. He kicked it off, and turned to catch it. Somehow just when Asa wanted to be real good, some kind of mischief would pop in his head. While trying to catch the fly he discovered his old playmate Billy, peacefully nibbling the grass. Now why couldn't the boy let the ram alone? We don't

know nor he don't ; but he mechanically took up his straw hat which lay on the floor and looking slyly at his father, who was kneeling about the centre of the room his back toward the door, and assuring himself that neither his mother nor sister were watching him, he shook his hat at the ram.

Billy saw that hated straw hat, and became belligerent. The ram's eyes flashed fire, and shaking his head, he backed off, seeming to say by his very actions : " Now I'll knock that hateful old straw hat of Asa's into the middle of next week, or surrender my reputation as a head pounder."

Billy backed off a considerable distance to give a full sweeping effect to his blow.

The prayer went on, and Asa, now seemingly possessed of some impish spirit, shook his hat more determinedly at the ram. Mr. Mullen had just got into the center of the wilderness, and Moses had struck the stone of living water with his rod, when there came a mighty rushing of wind, the clatter of a regiment of cavalry, and an avalanche, a thunderbolt and locomotive at speed of a hundred miles an hour all combined, seemed to strike the good Mr. Mullen between the shoulders. Head over heels over the chair, flying through the air, the good man went, lighting on his back in a far corner of the room. He was considerably stunned, and as his wife and the

anxious Asa helped him to his feet, he breathlessly stammered :

“Susan—Susan, I’ll be derved if I don’t kill that sheep.”

CHAPTER II.

HOW SIS' BEAU GOT IN TROUBLE.

THE blue grass State is said to be noted for its fine horses, but it may also be said to be noted for its beautiful ladies. Beauty of every description, shade and color runs riot in glorious old Kentucky. Here, where the hot air of the tropics is met by the cold wave from the arctics and changed to the gentle zephyr, beauty seems to abound. There are blondes and brunettes, and some neither ; some with hazel eyes and soft brown eyes, and golden hair, so that a searcher after the beautiful would be at a loss to tell which type of loveliness to select. Some one has said that Kentucky girls marry young. Well, they certainly never become old maids for lack of proposals.

Beauty in this land of blue grass, fine horses, and pretty girls, is not found alone in the cities, or even in the more pretentious country man-

sions. It abounds in the farm-house, the hovel or lonely wood-cutter's cabin. It may be found among the mountain breaks, where the ignorant and illiterate dwell. In that genial clime, wherever you go, you will find girls pretty enough to drive you crazy.

Clara Mullen was just as pretty as she could be. That was the general verdict of even the old spinsters who knew her, and when an old woman with a marriageable daughter of her own gives such a decision about a girl, you can rest assured there is some foundation for it. But Clara with her wealth of golden hair, her eyes blue as the clearest heaven, sunny roguish smiles, which seemed only born to display teeth of pearl and lips of ruby, was enough to drive half the young men in the neighborhood mad.

Clara was not quite so mischievous as her brother Asa, but it was only because she kept a better check on her fun loving propensities. She was a girl who was naughty but nice. If she did flirt a little it was only for the fun of the thing, and no one living could have told which one of her half dozen beaux she would accept. Her charms were known even at the great cities, and she had beaux from Louisville and Lexington. There was Mr. Paul Webster from Louisville, and Messrs. Sammy Flaxseed and Billy Smallthrash from Lexington, who were almost

"dead gone" on Clara. She had in addition, half-a-dozen rustic beaux, who were trying hard to cut out them "city chaps."

The Friday following the disastrous event which closed the preceding chapter, brought Mr. Paul Webster from Louisville. Now Friday is an unlucky day, and why Paul selected this day is a mystery to us. Asa, who had not played a prank for four days, was growing decidedly hungry for some sort of amusement. His propensity for mischief had smothered and smouldered so long beneath the cover of parental discipline, that it was likely to burst forth like a volcanic eruption on whatever unfortunate victim happened to be in reach.

"Sis," he said, going to the kitchen where Clara was superintending the baking and doing the fine pastry work with her own lily white hands, "It's got to come somehow. I'll die 'fi don't do some mischief soon."

"Hush, Asa, an' go away," said Miss Clara,

"Oh, honey, ye jist orter be 'shamed o' yer self," said Aunt Sukey, who was a very religious old darkey. "D'ye think de good Lawd's agwine to bless a boy bad as you are?"

"Naw, Aunt Sukey, I guess I's a gone sucker," said Asa, throwing himself in a chair and twirling his straw hat.

"I say, Sis, isn't that yer beau just come in an' talkin' to pa."

"No ; it's Mr. Webster," said Miss Clara.

"Well, aint he yer beau?"

"No."

"Who is?"

"I have none."

"Oh, shugar—git out. Ye can't stuff me with chaff. He's yer beau, an' I bet now we don't git rid o' him afore Monday mornin'."

"Well, ye needn't worry yerself if we don't."

"Oh, I aint a goin' to, but I was jest a thinkin' I couldn't hold in that long."

Asa got up and was deliberately walking out of the kitchen trying to perform the feat with his hat which he had seen circus clowns do, when Clara, somewhat alarmed by his last remark, seized his arm.

"Look here, Asa," she said, while her large mischievous blue eyes tried hard to assume a look of solemnity, "you don't want to go to playing any tricks on Mr. Webster?"

"How d'ye know I don't?"

"Well, you better not."

"Oh, let go, Sis. I guess he'll git away from here with whole skin," and being released this very interesting specimen of Young America strode out of the kitchen.

Mischievous, fun loving Clara could not

repress a laugh, when she thought that her brother would undoubtedly bring her lover to grief.

Mr. Webster was a worthy young man, but so bashful that he had never been able to succeed well in society.

He had met this country belle while she was on a visit to her cousin in the city, and it is useless to say he had fallen in love with her. What mattered it to him that she was a little rural in her manner and speech, she was a diamond in the rough. Her heart was right; a merry, jolly, fun loving heart, indeed it was, but it was just such a heart as he could wish. It was a heart tender and warm, yet one to almost plague and annoy a poor bashful fellow like Paul to death.

Paul was a book-keeper in his uncle's large store. He was a young man of good family, excellent business qualifications, and would inherit a large share of his uncle's fortune. When he asked Clara's permission to call on her at her country home, she annoyed the poor fellow almost out of his wits before she would grant her consent.

Asa went into the room where his father sat propped up in the old arm chair, telling Mr. Webster how nearly he had lost his life by being butted over by the pet ram.

"I'd a killed the thing, an' I guess I orter a

done so," said the Kentucky farmer, "but my leetle boy's kinder sot his heart on it. They're great playmates, ye see, Mr. Webster. Did ye ever have a pet sheep?"

"No, sir," answered the bashful lover, wondering where Miss Clara was and wishing she would come in the room, that he might get a sight of her.

"Well, ye'd better never want to. They're the meanest pets ye ever seed. They seem to be kinder behavin' theirselves a leetle while, but it's only waitin' a chance to give ye a knock that'll send ye over into Tennessee."

Clara seemed decidedly coquetish this evening. She did not come to the apartment where her anxious lover was, until his patience had almost been worn threadbare, and then she just barely asked after his health, and hurried away to superintend the household duties which seemed to constantly demand her attention.

Finding that Miss Clara was a little shy, Mr. Webster, who possessed considerable shrewdness despite his bashful propensities, began to make friends with her incorrigible brother. Asa met his advances, and they took a ramble that evening through the woods.

"D'ye see that big dead tree," said Asa, pointing to a large dead oak across the hollows and forests.

"Oh yes."

"Wall, sir, d'ye know there's a panther comes on it every night, an' when the moon shines, ye kin see it."

"Is that so?" asked Mr. Webster, somewhat incredulously.

"D'ye think I'd lie to ye?" asked Asa Mullen with an injured air.

"No, no! Oh no."

"I say mister, yer goin' to stay all night, ain't ye?"

"I don't know?" Paul answered, blushing profusely.

"Oh, o' course ye will. You won't git to spark Sis one bit 'nless ye do. Wall, ef ye do, I'll watch that 'ar tree, 'n when the panther comes out 'll let ye know. Ef ye'll climb that big apple tree clus to our yard gate ye kin see him very well when he's up 'n that dead oak."

"Yes."

"Will ye come 'n see 'im?"

"Oh, of course."

"Well, I'll do it."

Had Paul known Asa, he would never have made that promise, but wishing to gain his favor, he was willing to promise almost anything.

That evening Miss Clara became generous enough to give a part of her society to Mr. Webster. Paul was delighted, and tried hard to

make himself agreeable, It was not because Paul did not possess the ability or information for a conversationalist, but he was really too bashful to do justice to himself. Clara, whose mischievous disposition was but little less than her brothers, seemed to take special pains to render her lover uncomfortable. She sometimes seemed cold and distant, at others she was affable and made him feel a little easy, until she would assume that frigid air which placed him again at a distance.

But notwithstanding these strange moods on the part of this lovely creature, Paul passed a pleasant evening, and retired assured that he had won the heart of the lovely Miss Mullen. His brain was in a whirl. A vision fairer than an angel was before him. Those golden locks and bright blue eyes formed the picture which to him was perfection. Then her voice was sweet as tones of silver. All lack of culture could be overlooked in one so perfectly lovely.

He was just sinking into a slumber to dream of golden-haired angels and bright blue eyes when he heard a low rapping at his door.

"Mistur, mistur, mistur, open the door," a voice said. He recognized it as the brother of that adored creature, and stopping only to draw on his pantaloons he opened the door.

"It's thar, come on," Asa whispered the moment the door was opened.

"What is it?"

"The panther's up in the big tree; com'n see it."

Now Paul did not care very much about seeing a panther, but he had promised to go with the boy and hardly dared refuse.

"Jest come right on,—don't wait to put yer clothes on, coz everybody's gone to bed."

Asa seized Paul by the arm and dragged him down a narrow stair way and before the bashful gentleman from Louisville had hardly realized it, he was going barefoot across the lawn which was not entirely free from pebbles and thorns. They reached a tree, and Asa whispered:

"Go up—climb up quick 'r it'll be gone." Paul thanked his stars that he knew enough of rural life to climb, and soon went up the tree to its topmost branches. He had scarce got there ere the air resounded with the barks of half-a-dozen furious dogs that rushed to the foot of the tree. Now Paul had a dread of dogs, and these were equal to bloodhounds.

To his great horror at this moment he heard Asa Mullen's voice in the house shouting:

"Sis, Sis, git up'n go'n see what them dogs hev treed; I've hurt my foot so't I can't walk."

CHAPTER III.

ASA'S REFORMATION.

"Asa, Asa, Asa," cried Mr. Mullen from his bed where he had been roused by the furious barking of his canine pets. "What's them dogs barkin' at?"

"They've got somethin' treed."

"Go'n see what it 'tis."

"I can't. I've jist sprained my ankle so't I can't hardly stand on it."

Mr. Mullen groaned. His injuries were such that he could not go, and he felt a strange conviction by the fury of the dogs, that they had cornered some thief who had come to invade his strawberry beds, or early apple trees.

"Can't ye see what it 'tis, Asa?" he cried.

Asa with a groan as if he was in great pain answered :

"Yes, it looks like a nigger in a tree stealin' water-melons."

"You infamous scamp," cried the father who disliked the jesting mood of his dear little boy, "if I only had you in reach and power to use my arms, I'd teach you that water-melons didn't grow on apple trees."

"Hurry up, Sis, 'n don't let him git away from the dogs," cried Asa.

Clara had already been aroused from the light slumber into which she had fallen, and the bright dream of that sad face which had been flitting before her vision, faded away. It is useless to say that she had been dreaming of Mr. Paul Webster, who at that moment was in the apple tree half dead with fear and mortification.

"Why, confound the little whelp," said Paul to himself while his teeth chattered. "Is he going to expose me in this way. Good Lord—Miss Clara coming too, the dogs will tear me to pieces if I descend to run away—what must I do?"

At this moment he heard the voice of his youthful tormenter calling :

"Sis—Sis, why don't ye hurry up. He'll git away."

"Why don't you go yourself, Asa?" the sweet voice of Miss Clara was heard to ask.

"Cos I've broke my leg," the boy howled as if in extreme pain.

"Well, I'm coming as soon as I dress."

"Never mind dressin' ; 'taint no time when a nigger's in a tree, to put on cloze."

Clara insisted an partially dressing at least, but her small feet were bare however, and her

pink toes peeped out into the moonlight beneath her skirt, as she stepped into the yard. "What is it?" she asked herself, slowly and cautiously approaching the tall tree around which the dogs were howling, barking and prancing in such a manner as to keep up a deafening din. That it was something there could be no mistake, though the thick leaves prevented her from seeing it.

From his exalted position the horrified gentleman from Louisville saw the pretty country girl with her wealth of golden hair about her shoulders, her great blue eyes widely distended in wonder, like some bare-footed fairy in the moonlight tripping down the hill. She had never seemed so beautiful as now, and he in his awkward predicament seemed as if he would die in that apple tree.

"What is it?" said the brave girl to herself. "Who is there in the tree?" she demanded. "Come down or I will get father's gun and fire a load of shot into the tree."

She did this to frighten the thief, for she would not for the world have hurt any one, even if it had been a thief.

"Oh—don't Miss Clara—it is only me?"

Sis started in amazement, and a moment later began to titter. For a few moments she could not get command over her risibles, but as soon as she did, she asked :

"Is that you, Mr. Webster?"

"It is," was the faint and despairing reply.

"Do you walk about in your sleep?"

"Oh—no—I—I—I, no I don't."

"Never? What in the world are you doing up in that tree?" she asked, breaking down and laughing until the tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I—I came here to s-s-s-s-see the panther, Miss Mullen."

"Well, you've seen it. I guess you had better come down," said Sis, who now understood that her brother had, to use his own language, "broke loose again," and perpetrated this joke on her city beau.

"B-b-h-b-but I can't; the d-d-d-d-dogs will tear me to p-p-p-p-pieces," stammered Mr. Webster.

"Oh, yes—I will drive them away."

It was humiliating to a brave lover to have his adored one come barefooted to his rescue, and drive away the dangerous dogs which he dared not venture near. Sis seized a stick and soon sent the last howling cur to his kennel, and then returned to the house herself. Mr. Webster descended to the ground, and was just half way to the house when the dogs discovered him and again made at him. He had barely time to reach his tree once more, and climb to a place of safety, when they were all about him as determined as before.



“He had barely time to reach his tree once more.”—Page 28.

Sis who had seen her lover's rapid flight, could not restrain her laughter. Like silver peals of rippling music it rang out on the air. The ludicrous figure the gentleman from Louisville cut was enough to have made a stone laugh. She once more came to his aid and, driving the dogs away, guarded him to the house.

With cheeks burning with shame Paul reached his room. He sat down by the bed wondering if he had not better walk to the station and take the next train to Louisville, when the door opened and the impish face of Asa Mullen was clearly outlined in the pale light which the moon shed in the room.

"I say, mister," he grinned, "I come to ax ye ef ye'd seen the panther."

Men in a fit of desperation sometimes become brave as lions; and Paul had had enough to rouse him. He was no fool, and no coward, and much as he would have liked to spank that boy, he called him in.

"What yer want?" Asa asked.

"Come in—I want to know if your ankle has got well?"

"Wall, it's improvin'," said Asa with a grin.

"You're a rather clever boy, Asa."

Asa thrust his tongue in his cheek. Boys can usually be thrown off their balance by subtle flattery, and Paul had determined to have revenge

on this youngster. He would take revenge in some genteel way. He would match units with him and beat him at his own game.

"I say, Asa, you are a cunning boy. I mean you are cute; don't you understand me?"

"Reckin' I do boss," said Asa. "Ye think I'm some pumpkins."

"That's it exactly. Now Asa the Fourth of July is coming, wouldn't you like to have some fire crackers?"

Asa reflected a moment and seemed to think it would be right nice to "hev a bunch to tie to the tail o' pa's hoss, an' tech 'em off jest as he got on."

"Well you shall have them, Asa, for you are a real interesting boy."

Asa assured him that he always endeavored to make it interesting for everybody around him. He gave the boy a silver quarter, and asked him if he did not suppose his sister thought him an awful coward.

"Naw," said Asa. "Sis knows them dogs an' kin make 'em mind her easy enough, but they'd a tore ye to flinders ef they'd a got hold o' ye."

"Now, Asa, don't you really think you treated me mean?"

Asa hung his head, chewed his finger nails a moment, and said :

"Wall, Boss, I guess I did; but then I never set the dogs on ye."

"Who did?"

"They jest sot 'emselves on ye."

"Asa you should have come and rescued me."

"I would; but ye see I come to the house to git a gun for ye to shoot the panther, and when I was goin' up stairs I fell, an' thought my leg was broke."

"Asa," said Paul, his emotions almost getting the better of his manhood.

"What?" asked the penitent boy.

"You must explain all this to your sister."

"Oh, I will—I'll make it all right with Sis, you kin jest bet," said Asa, as if glad of any way of getting Mr. Webster out of his awkward dilemma.

Paul would not trust the boy too far. His fun-loving, mischief-making propensity made him rather traitorous to even his friends. He bade him an affectionate good night, and as he left the room voted him the "worst boy alive."

"This is a pretty predictment for me to be in," said the lover to himself as he once more turned into bed. "I've a notion to go back home. I declare that I don't believe I'm wanted here."

But next morning when he saw the bright sparkling face and felt the warmth of that sweet smile with which Miss Clara graciously condescended to greet him, he felt that it was good for

him to be there. Then both Mr. and Mrs. Mullen were sorry that the dogs came so near getting him, and really thought that Asa would be the death of all of them.

"He'll be hung, I know it," said Mr. Mullen. "A boy that's as full o' mischief as Asa is, will be hung."

Asa hung his head, looked very penitent and twirling his straw hat a moment, said :

"I jest wanted Mr. Webster to see the big panther."

"Panther, ye goose, thar's no panthers round here," cried the father angrily.

"Don't ye know that big panther what flies up in the tree and goes hoot-a-hoot-a whoo-ah."

"You brazen igeot, that aint a panther," cried the father.

"What is it then?"

"A owl."

"Well, pa, he didn't know the difference," said Asa.

"If that confounded sheep had'nt bruised my shoulders, so't I can't use my arms, I'd teach you the difference," responded the irate sire.

Asa with an air of a boy very much injured dropped his head and slowly retired from the room. Mr. Mullen was a warm-hearted man. A reaction almost immediately took place in his sensitive nature.

"May be I've done th' boy wrong. Well, I've tanned his jacket so often that I guess he don't know right from wrong."

"What're ye allers scoldin' that child fur, Pap?" asked Aunt Susan as Mrs. Mullen was usually known.

"Oh, mother, he's so carnsarned mean, he'll agravate the life out'n me. I'll jest bet anything ef the truth was known, he's the cause o' Billy buttin' me over, and cripplin' me this way."

"Now thar 'tis agin. Everything thets done hes to be laid on thet child. It makes no difference ef only a pet ram does something', Asa's to blame. Warnt he in the house, a kneelin' over his cheer an' jest as quiet as could be."

"But when he's quiet, he's allers a thinkin' up some mischief."

Aunt Susan knowing that Asa's pa was always too hard on him allowed that individual to have the last word. The old lady's pink face had very few wrinkles, and in her neat white cap border it looked quite youthful. She was one of those females whose beauty ripens but never fades. Her's was a mature beauty, and she seemed only to grow more beautiful by growiug old. The good-natured, laughing, mischievous Clara was like her mother, and promised to remain beautiful all her life long.

They made Paul feel so welcome that despite

the mean trick Asa had played on him, he resolved to remain over Sunday and accompany Miss Clara to church. Asa seemed very penitent, and told Paul that he was going to be a better boy. He saddled the horses Sunday morning and night for Paul and Clara to ride to church, and really seemed under conviction. Clara was the most beautiful equestrian Paul had ever seen in his life. She was a graceful rider, and the exercise gave a bright glow to her cheek and added a sparkle to her eye.

Mr. Mullen was a good old Baptist, but he entertained the Methodist circuit rider when he came around, just as willingly as he did his own preacher. He attended when either preached in the school-house, but at present he was "laid up." He instructed Clara to tell Mr. Caldwell, the Methodist preacher, whose Sunday it was to hold services in the school-house, to come and stay all night, and that gentleman knowing that Uncle Abram and his wife were good, whole-souled Christians readily assented, especially as Uncle Abram was laid up from a hurt.

Paul found when he went to assist Miss Clara on her horse after night meeting was over, that by some mysterious manner their saddles had been changed, and not knowing very much about the gearing himself, was obliged to call a young farmer and rival, to assist him. Of course he

knew not that the impish face of Asa Mullen was watching him behind a tree, yet as he rode home with Clara, he thought that perhaps after all the boy's reformation might not be genuine.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW ASA MADE THE PREACHER STEAL A HOG.

"DID 'ye ever see a bar?"

"A wild bear?"

"Yes, sir."

"No—not a real wild bear in the woods."

"I hev."

"Are there any about here?"

"Yes, sir,—sometimes these ere woods is full o' em."

It was Monday morning. The family had breakfasted and the Methodist circuit rider, Mr. Caldwell, was strolling about the house, gazing at those far-off blue hills, deep hollows, and picturesque scenery. He was a good man and loved nature. Those bold rocks on the bluff across the stream were a soft gray, reflecting the rays of the sunshine, and the dark green old forests enough to delight any lover of the beautiful.

Owing to Mr. Mullen's accident, he had been

unable to get his corn planting completed, and his neighbors to the number of a dozen or two were to gather in that day to assist the hired negroes to complete it for him, and hoe out his cotton. Mrs. Mullen was to prepare a big dinner, and both Mr. Caldwell and Paul had been asked to remain. Paul's leave of absence having run out, he could not avail himself of this kind invitation, but there was nothing to prevent Mr. Caldwell, so he assented.

Mr. Caldwell was a new man on this circuit. He had come from Ohio, and had not become thoroughly acquainted with Asa. He remembered now to have read of bears in some parts of the wilds of Kentucky, and supposed that Asa knew something of them.

Asa showed the farmers what had to be done, and then gave them to understand that as he was to entertain the preacher that day, he would take a holiday.

"Have you seen a bear lately?" Mr. Caldwell asked the boy.

"Yes—I saw a dozen this mornin'," Asa answered. "Kin ye shoot a gun?"

"Oh, yes; I have hunted turkeys and all sorts of small game, but I never got a shot at a bear."

"Wouldn't ye like to?"

"Why I should, very much," said the minister,

who thought it would be an excellent thing to relate the actual adventures of a bear hunt at the next annual conference.

"Wall, I tell ye what I kin do," said Asa speaking rather confidentially to the minister as though he feared "some o' the other chaps" would hear him and cheat them out of the sport. "Do you go down under the hill, an' wait fur me. I'll git pa's rifle and the hosses, you'r hoss an' one o' pa's, an' we'll go off an' you kin shoot a bar an' bring it in fur dinner ye know."

This little fraud on the part of Asa did not seem very bad to Mr. Caldwell. He thought it very reasonable that if those men knew there was game near, they would be sure to want to have a hand in the hunt themselves, and would doubtless neglect the work for which they had come. So Mr. Caldwell went to the bottom of the hill as directed, and in a few minutes Asa came to him with his own horse and a young half-broke animal which he rode himself, disdain-
ing to use a saddle.

"Now jest wait a few minits longer 'n I'll go 'n git pa's gun."

"Do you suppose he has any objections—?"

"Objections, nuthin," said Asa. "Pa don't keer,—course ye won't hurt the gun."

The minister was in the power of this juvenile schemer, and had to abide his actions and desires.

Then what harm could there be in his taking a hunt. He had come among these people for the purpose of converting them to Christianity, and in order to do so, he was willing to, in a certain measure,—as far as he dared,—adopt their customs and habits. He would enjoy bear hunting, and knowing his horse to be swift and gentle, he knew there could be little or no danger in such an undertaking.

Asa ran to the house as fast as his bare feet would carry him, and without allowing his parents or sister to see him, stole out his father's rifle, bullet pouch and powder horn.

"The gun's loaded, I reckon," said Asa to himself as he stole along through a passage between the houses and darted, round the smoke-house. Here he called a halt to examine it himself. Yes, there was a cap grinning on the tube, and there could be no doubt but that the old fire-arm was loaded. "Ef he don't git the buck ager, an'll hold'er right, she'll drop one o' 'em at the fust crack," said Asa with a chuckle. One who was acquainted with Asa Mullen would never have gone with him on a bear hunt. Mr. Caldwell in blissful ignorance of the terrible character with whom he was dealing, smiled approvingly on the boy, and after glancing at the splendid Kentucky rifle with some degree of pride, said :

"Now, my good boy, if you'll show me where it can be found, we'll have bear meat for dinner."

"Git on yer hoss, an' come 'long," said Asa quickly.

"Hadn't I better help you on your horse?"

"Naw, jist look at me," and with a dexterous bound Asa placed himself upon the back of the half-broken colt. Mr. Caldwell vaulted into his saddle and rode along with Asa, who was very serious,—very solemn just now.

"Did ye say ye never hunted bar?"

"Yes, I said I never hunted a bear."

"Ever seed one?" Asa asked.

"Never,—a wild one."

"Wall, they're jest the slyest things ye ever seed'n all yer born days."

"How, Asa?"

"Cos ye jist see 'em a minit un' the next minit ther gone. Ye've got 't be mighty quick'er he'll git away from ye."

"I'm a quick shot," said Mr. Caldwell hopefully. "If you will show the bear to me I'll hit it."

"Ye've got to drap him jest the minit ye see him cos he's so quick, he'll be out o' sight the next minit."

"I know it, Asa"

"Ther the quickest things any one ever saw."

"I appreciate all you've said my dear boy," said the Methodist preacher, who really began to think Asa one of the most remarkable boys he had ever met in his life. He was liable to be convinced in a short time that he was a most remarkable youth.

The summer morning was glorious. The sun was shining above Hoyne's Bluffs and the trees, clothed in their richest verdure, were filled with feathered warblers. Down below them, around which the road wound, was Miraldo's Hollow, about which so many dark superstitions lingered that the negroes usually kept shy of the place. Then farther on was the Devil's Teapot, which seethed and boiled from an immense sink or hole in the earth. There was a rocky precipitous path descending down from ledge to ledge until the Teapot was reached. It was nothing more than one of those boiling springs so common, and yet about which there were so many superstitious legends. Asa beguiled the minister with stories of the bluff, the Teapot, and Miraldo's Hollow where a Spaniard by the name of Miraldo had been murdered, and his ghost had been seen frequently walking about in the moonlight, groaning and shrieking as if it was in a terrible fix. Mr. Caldwell of course was skeptical as to the ghost business, but being one of those sensible men who doesn't believe in hampering the youthful

imagination within the narrow limits of the possible, let Asa go on.

"How far are we from the place where we will find the bears?" he at last asked when Asa had in a measure exhausted himself.

"Oh jest a little ways round Mr. Dallyripple's fence in a canebrake, yer most sure to find 'em," said Asa his eyes twinkling. "Now, Mr. Caldwell," he said turning his mischievous yet apparently earnest eyes on the circuit rider, "Ye kin preach furst rate, but I'm afraid you can't shoot straight."

"Yes, I can."

"Well, but I'm afraid you won't be quick enough."

"I will ; whenever we are in the neighborhood of the bears, I will cock my gun and shoot the first one I see."

"But ye must shoot quick. Shoot before he gits a sight o' ye, or a whiff o' the air ; ef ye don't he'll wheel about and be a goner."

Mr. Caldwell was worked up to a point where he was ready to shoot at a black stump and think it a bear. He was assured that there was little or no danger of the bears attacking them, but that the main danger was in their running away the moment he discovered them.

They came at last to the hunting ground and prepared for the conflict. Asa seemed to feel the

excitement. His eyes sparkled, and his cheeks were aglow, and he was delighted as only a fourteen year old boy can be at the prospect of a hunt.

"D'ye see that patch o' cane yander, Mr. Caldwell?" he asked, pointing to a small canebrake in the distance.

"Yes," answered the circuit rider, scarce less excited than the boy.

"Wall they're in that. Now, I'll go round it an' skeer 'em out this way, an' the minit ye ketch a sure aim on one shoot. Ye'd better git down an' take a rest off'n yer saddle. They go in droves, the bar's do."

The unsophisticated preacher did as he was bid, and Asa making a wide circuit, using a world of caution, which Mr. Caldwell supposed was necessary in a bear hunt, was at last on the opposite side of the canebrake.

Mr. Caldwell, waiting with cocked rifle only about a hundred paces from the bear infested canebrake, heard the shout which Asa was to give and drive the bears out. Soon he saw the cane and tall grass agitated by a drove of animals, fleeing toward him. By a desperate effort he steeled his nerves and held his rifle in a hand that did not tremble. It was not long until he saw the outline of a jet black object, and taking a quick but sure aim at it, he pulled the trigger.

There was a sharp report accompanied by a sort of a squeal, and a dozen other dark objects which had been almost in sight ran off. Mr. Caldwell hurried up to the spot to find a large black hog just in the last agonies of death. At this moment Asa came galloping into view.

"Wall," Mr. Caldwell, ye throwed one o' em did ye, he cried.

"Yes,—but, Asa, it's not a bear, it's a hog."

"Is it? wall, now, that's a dog on pity."

"I would not have killed another man's hog, for my right arm."

"She's a fat ole Berksheer sow, too; make good meat."

"What will we do, Asa?" asked the preacher with a deep sigh.

"Do? Oh! take it home o' course. It'd be a sin to let a fine fat hog lay here'n spile. Pa kin find out who it b'longs to an' pay 'em."

This seemed very reasonable, and the preacher asked him if he could not take it on his horse.

"Oh, no," said Asa, shaking his head. "My colt won't carry nothin' 'tall. I'll help it up to you, but my colt won't carry dead meat."

After many exertions by the united effort of man and boy the hog was put on Mr. Caldwell's horse, and they started home. As they went along home Asa reflected:

"That's Mr. Dallyripple's old Berksheer sow't



"I'll help you lift it, but my colt won't carry dead meat."—

he thought so much of. He'll swear a blue streak."

Mr. Dallyripple was helping his father that day. It was noon when the hunters returned. Mr. Caldwell carrying the game before him. The hands to the number of a dozen were in the front yard. The moment they were in sight of them, Asa laid whip, and galloping up, shouted:

"Preacher Caldwell stole a hog! Preacher Caldwell stole a hog!"

CHAPTER V.

ASA'S PA PUZZLED.

"THAR Susan,—some other mischief broke loose," cried Mr. Abram Mullen who was sitting near the window.

"What's the matter now, Abram?"

"That confounded boy's been playin' some kind o' trick on the parson."

Mr. Mullen was enabled to walk about now by the aid of a cane, and seizing his big crooked stick, he hobbled out into the front yard.

"Asa, Asa, ye scamp, stop that thar yellin'—what d'ye mean?"

"Preacher Caldwell stole a hog."

"What, you scoundrel ; what do you mean ?"

"Yes he has, pa ; thar he comes with it now," said Asa, and, as if to prove what the boy had said, Mr. Caldwell rode up to the gate and threw down the hog he had slain.

Mr. Dallyripple who had come to the gate grew furious the moment he saw the dead hog.

"Look'ee here parson," he cried in a voice full of fury, "What'n thunder'd ye kill my fine Berksheer sow for ?"

"I-I-I-I didn't intend to do it, sir.

"Ye didn't th'ell ye didn't, but ye did. Now I'm not goin' to stand this any longer. My best Berksheer sow killed ; why ye'll steal my hoss next——"

"I beg pardon," gasped Mr. Caldwell, who being a new man on this backwoods circuit expected to be lynched.

"Beg pawdon ; beggin' pawdon don't pay me fur my sow."

"Stop now, Dallyripple," cried Abram Mullen, "don't ye know the preacher's here."

"Preacher ! yes a preacher what kills hogs. The country's full o' sich preachers."

"Please let me explain," implored Mr. Caldwell, so extremely mortified that he felt as if he would faint on the spot.

"'Splain, thunder, I'd rather you'd pay me fur my hog."

"I'll do it. What is the price of your hog. I will pay you for it and you may have the pork," said Mr. Caldwell, somewhat roused at the unjust treatment he had received. Mr. Caldwell was a conscientious man of God, and would have lost his right arm rather than have done this deed. Mr. Mullen who was the soul of generosity, and having a strong premonition that his son was in some way responsible for the act, now brought affairs to a peaceable termination by buying the dead hog of Mr. Dallyripple.

"Now, gentlemen," said the good minister when everything had been satisfactorily terminated, "allow me to explain matters if you please. I must do so to set myself right before these people. I went out this morning to kill a bear."

"A bear—" roared every one in astonishment. Then Mr. Mullen added, "why, parson thar haint been a bar in this country fur twenty years."

"Well, brother Mullen, if there is not, your son is certainly not altogether truthful."

"Truthful," cried the irate father. "He's the biggest liar, and fullest o' wickedness o' any boy around here."

Asa finding his reputation for truth and veracity in danger, now came forward to his own defence.

"I heer'd some 'un talkin' about thar bein' bulls an' bars in town, an' I thought 'at may be them black things I saw war bars got out; but they war Mr. Dallyripple's hogs."

"Sambo," Mr. Mullen called to a tall, slender darkey who was drawing water for the horses.

"Yes, sah."

"Do you want to make an extra two bits."

"I does, sah."

"Well jist ketch Asa and bring him down under the hill close to the spring house."

Asa knew what was coming. He had dismounted from his horse and made him fast to a sapling just beyond the gate. He sprang to the horse, but Sambo equally as quick, sprang to the boy, and in a moment had him collared, before he could get the colt released and mount.

Asa was not to surrender so easily. He kicked and fought and struggled like a mad man, but the promise of two bits had a stimulating effect on Sambo, and he clung to him like grim death, dragging the struggling, fighting boy down the hill, where the old man Mullen had gone, and was already cutting switches. A few minutes later Asa's howls kept time with the measured strokes of his pa's arm. He was released and went off to enjoy a season of rest, and form some plan of getting even with his pa.

"Sis," he said that night when all the guests

were gone and he found himself alone with Clara in the kitchen, "don't you think pa treated me real mean?"

"You did very bad, Asa," she answered.

"How?"

"By making the preacher shoot Dallyripple's hog, and having old man Dallyripple scold the way he did."

"Law, sis, I didn't make him shoot the hog; I didn't tell him to kill the hog. I took him out thar to kill a bar, 'n if the fool can't tell a hog from a bar he'd better give up his license an' quit preachin'."

"Oh, Asa, I don't know what will become of you."

"I do."

"What?"

"Pa'll kill me."

"Oh, hush."

"Yes, he will; now see 'f he don't."

Clara who had really laughed herself at the serious joke played on Mr. Caldwell, told Asa to go away and not bother her.

Next morning Asa was sad. He went to the field to help Jake and Sambo some, for the neighbors had not got quite all the planting done. He worked faithfully all morning, and at noon ventured for the first time in his father's presence.

"Pa," he said in a deep solemn voice. "I hed a awful bad dream last night, 'n I b'lieve its goin' to come true."

"What was it, my son?"

"I drempt you killed me."

"What?—killed you?—killed my little boy.?"

"Yes, pa. I drempt you killed yer little boy. I thought I was tryin' to do somethin' right, an' jest as I allers do I done it wrong, 'n you took a gun an' shot me."

It is useless to say Mr. Mullen was deeply moved. He feared that the severe chastisement of Asa the day before, might in some way have deranged his brain.

"Asa, d'ye feel sick?" he asked tenderly.

"I don't feel very well," the boy sadly answered.

"Come here and let me see if you have a fever." He placed his hand affectionately on the brow of his little boy, and turning to his wife said, "mother, his head's real hot."

Asa was at that moment as sick a looking boy as one would often see.

"No, pa—I'm not sick," he said with a sigh. "It's the dream, nuthin' but the dream that's worryin' me."

"Never mind the dream," said the father, "you'll forget it soon."

"But, pa, did you know I've tuk to walkin' about in my sleep," said Asa.

"No child, have ye?"

"Yes, I hev. Why tother night I waked up, 'n found myself way down the hill 'n the big hickory tree."

Mr. Mullen opened his eyes wide with wonder.

"Why, Asa, what 'f ye'd a fell?"

"No danger, pa, 'nless some one'd tried to wake me. Sleep walkers don't fall by ther selves ye know."

Mr. Mullen gazed in admiration and wonder upon his son. Surely never before had he seen such wisdom displayed by a youth, as he expressed. He had heard that the brightest flowers wither soonest, and might not this brilliant intellect indicate an early death?

"Asa," said the kind father, his warm heart overflowing with affection, "Don't ye know't I wouldn't hurt my little boy fur nuthing' in the world. Oh, Asa, don't ye know how yer pa loves ye?"

"I expect ye do, pa; but then 't seems that when I try to do things right I allers do 'em wrong. I 'bleve I'm goin' to be killed, 'n then I'll be like the ghost o' Miraldo's Holler goin' bout groanin' and wailin' all the time."

"Oh, Asa, my little boy, hush. You have

worked too hard, you must rest the remainder of the day."

Asa was not really a lazy boy. His only objection to work was that it interfered with his business. He wanted the afternoon before him to plan for the evening's amusement. Back of the woodshed in a corner sacred to himself, he might have been found that afternoon quite busy with a suit of his own clothes.

He has a pile of cotton before him, and was deliberately stuffing his old clothes. In fact Asa was making an effigy which was to be a second self. He worked faithfully—Asa always worked faithfully when his heart was in the work, and now all his energies were engaged.

The effigy grew under his skillful hand until a second boy was behind the woodshed. It was an exact counterpart of Asa. No artist could have accomplished the work better than Asa, and in a dim light the effigy would have been easily mistaken for a boy. The head was made by stuffing a narrow pillow case with cotton and squeezing a hat upon it. Asa having completed his work stood back and gazed at it with a critical eye. Innate mischief was expressed in every lineament of his features as he declared to himself:

"Guess that'll do."

The reader is doubtless wondering at what Asa is driving. Had he been near the old

Mullen homestead that night about midnight, and seen how busy he was in the maple tree which grew at the window of his father's bedroom, an idea of some scheme would doubtless have come to his mind.

Asa was in the tree-top and dragged the effigy up after him. It had a string attached to it, by which he could at a jerk bring it down to the ground again. Asa was busying himself with the effigy for some minutes, when he got it fastened to suit his notion and then descended from the tree.

He climbed down very cautiously, for it was not his intent at that moment to rouse any of the sleeping household. Asa very quietly and prudently roused the dogs and brought them to the tree. He showed them the object in it, and instantly they began to make the night hideous with their wild howls and yelps. Around and around the tree they circled, barking and yelping all the time, waking every member of the household.

"Susan—Susan," cried Uncle Abram starting from his bed, "What 'n the name o' the Lawd hev the dogs got treed now."

"I don't know, Abram," his wife answered, "unless its another nigger in the plum tree."

"Ef I ketch a nigger in my plum tree I'll git my gun an' pepper him," cried Abram.

Asa was only a few feet away from the tree

lying behind a small rockery, holding to one end of string, while the other was attached to the effigy in the tree, when his father appeared on the porch with his gun. Asa saw the old gentleman gazing steadfastly up into the tree-top, until he made out the outline of some large animal or person.

"Susan—Susan," he said softly to his wife, who was just behind him, "It's somethin'; it's either a panther or a man, an' I've a notion to let fly at it."

The dogs yelped and howled so fiercely about he at last determined to let fly. Cocking his gun he brought it to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. Now it so happened that Uncle Abram had the old smooth bore gun, which Asa had charged three times over that day with powder and beans. There was a tremendous explosion, and Abram was kicked backward against his wife, and both sent sprawling to the floor.

Just as he got up Abram heard a scream, a groan, and the words: "Oh, pa, ye've killed me," smote in his ears. At this moment the horrified father saw an object about the size of his own little boy come tumbling down from the tree-top. From limb to limb, branch to branch it fell, until at last it struck the ground, and to his horror the dogs were on it rending it to pieces.

“Oh, good Lawd, Susan,” screamed Abram. “I’ve killed Asa, my own dear little boy.”

Aunt Susan grew faint and leaned against the doorway for support. Her husband flew to the dogs, beat them right and left, until he had seized a mangled object of about six pounds weight in his arms, and bore it to the porch.

“Susan—Susan, what is this?” he asked in amazement.

She did not dare gaze at the mangled form of her son, and sank down to the floor. Abram held the mangled effigy in his arms and was not a little puzzled, until a snicker from behind the rockery attracted his attention; and the shouts of real agony from Asa, soon assured his mother that he was not dead.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOG FIGHT IN THE DARK.

THE neighborhood in which the Mullen family lived was noted for being rather better morally than the adjoining neighborhoods. The sprees, the fights and dances were fewer in this particular valley than on the ridge, or across in Pember-ton’s Bottom or Wild Cat Holler. True, old Dallyripple was regarded a hard case, and there

were many other cases equally as hard, but these were more than off-set by such staid Christians as Abram Mullen, Jasper Daniels, and old Uncle Johnny Crocket. These three were strict church members, and never did anything bad. True they did go to log-rollings sometimes, and drank a little too much warm toddy, but in those days warm toddy was thought to be necessary for a man's health. No one could get along without toddy, eggnog, or tanzy and whiskey in either extremely warm, extremely cold, or medium weather.

It was Mr. Jorden Culbertson's time to hold a meeting at the school-house, and he came on Saturday to give this neighborhood two days instead of one of his time. Mr. Culbertson was a good old-fashioned Baptist, who made up in noise what he lacked in eloquence. Since Asa's last prank on his parents, he had been a very good boy. To use his own expression he really felt easier. Asa, of course, was not a very bad boy. His pa did not think he was, unless it was immediately after some of his "awful capers." He rather thought Asa was "just a boy."

"Pa," said Asa on the Saturday Mr. Culbertson was to preach in their school-house, "I'm goin' to do better, won't you let me go to church to-night?"

Asa's pa looked at him a moment, and then said :

"If I wasn't afraid ye'd do some mischief afore the meetin' was over, I wouldn't keer, Asa, but it seems that ye can't go nowhere nor do nothin' without gittin' into some kind o' trouble."

"It seems to me that way too, pa," said Asa with sadness in his voice. "I don't try to be a bad boy, but I can't help it. People don't quite understand me I reckon."

"I'm afraid most of 'em don't, Asa."

"'F they did they'd see 'twas all in fun."

Abram Mullen looked savage at his little boy for a moment, and replied :

"Yas, Asa, that's the trouble wi' you. You are too much in fun. Ef ye'd hev a leetle grain o' earnestness about ye, ye'd not be climbin' into trees an' puttin' up dummies fur dogs to bark at."

"I didn't know 'twould wake ye, pa."

"Wake me, ye little igeot ; wouldn't it wake a dead man to have a dozen dogs howlin' and yelpin' that close to him ?"

"Wall, pa, I won't do so no more. Won't ye let me go 't meetin' ter night ?"

I would never do to keep his own dear little boy away from church. He might after all reform, so the father consented. Asa was very well pleased with his father's decision, even though

he gave it with the following addenda :—" Now, see here, Asa, ef I see or hear o' any o' yer carryin's on t' night, I'll wallop ye within an inch o' yer life."

But then Asa cared nothing for this threat. He wanted to go to "meetin'," and he had been walloped within an inch of his life so often, that he really did not care if he got there once more, before shaking off this mortal coil. Asa went to the school-house alone. He was allowed to ride his favorite colt and whistled to Blunche his favorite dog to accompany him. Had Blunche stayed at home we do not think there would have been any trouble, but his going was a sad thing for that meeting. Asa reached the school-house and made his horse fast to a sapling. The building stood in a grove of small trees upon a slight eminence, and one could not see it until they were almost to it. Here Asa attended school during winter, and had received more whippings beneath the roof than there were shingles on it. He was regarded as the worst boy in the neighborhood, and if a day passed with him unwhipped, the school directors thought the teacher derilect in his duty.

Asa having made his colt fast to the sapling, called Blunche softly, to assure himself that the dog was on hand, and then looked at the various horses and vehicles standing in the grove.

There was a great temptation to do some mischief, but Asa controlled himself and went to the house. It was already dark and the house was dimly lighted with a single tallow candle which Uncle Johnny Crocket had had the forethought to bring with him.

There were a few boys standing outside the school-house, and these tried to get Asa to remain outside and have some fun ; but Asa had really determined to reform. He tried hard to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," as his good old mother had told him to do when tempted, but was unable just then to think of the words, so went into the house. Blunche followed him. The school-house was almost twice as long as wide, and had long benches with backs to them for the scholars in school, or the people "at meetin' to sit on." These were arranged lengthwise with the house, so the audience sat "sidewise," to the preacher, who was behind a small stand-table on which was a small candle, the only light in the room.

The room was pretty well filled when Asa came in, and he had to go forward within four or five feet of the stand. Blunche still followed him. It was regarded, however, as no breach of decorum to allow your dog to accompany you to church.

Asa's pa, who had preceded the precocious

youth, was pleased to see him up in the "Aye-men corner."

"If old brother Culbertson says anything t'night, I guess it'll soak in on Asa," Uncle Abram thought. "He's jist got near enough to hear it all."

Blunche crouched at his young master's feet. On a seat almost opposite Asa, just across the narrow aisle, sat Sally Blow. Now Asa did not like Sally very well, and he hated her brother Dick Blow, because he had got many a hard blow from him. Dick Blow's favorite dog Tige had come with Sally, and crouched at her feet. Blunche didn't like Tige one bit better than Asa liked Dick Blow, nor did Tige like Blunche.

Rev. John Culbertson was behind the slight stand which did not weigh to exceed six pounds even when the candle, his pocket bible, and the hymn book were on it. The parson at last rose, "lined a familiar hymn," and asked the congregation to sing it.

Old Uncle Johnny Crocket had a reputation as a singer, and he "started the song." One, two, then three voices joined in, and at last the entire audience with a few exceptions, seemed to ignite and all went roaring on with more or less discord. High above all the others, leading them through the doubtful mazes of a jerky

tune, could be heard the voice of old Uncle Johnny.

It was during that song that Blunche discovered his old enemy Tige, who had crouched at Sally Blow's feet. Blunche growled and showed his teeth, but the noise was too great for his ominous growl to be audible.

Tige's attention was directed to the naked calf of an urchin over on the men's side, and his mouth was watering to get in one good square bite, and he did not observe the challenge of his old enemy. The song was ended, prayer was offered, and then came two or three verses of "When I can read my title clear—"

Then Rev. Culbertson took his text. We don't remember just what the text was, nor does it make much difference as far as the sermon was concerned. Rev. John Culbertson was an old timer who never allowed himself to be hampered by a text or the new fangled idea of sticking to the subject. He always began at Genesis and usually closed with Revelations, so his text might be found anywhere between the first chapter of the former and the last chapter of the latter.

He referred to "Nī-cöd-emus" who said "marvel not." He became very enthusiastic as he got heated up, and pounding the small stand till he made the solitary candle dance, he bawled out :

“ And, oh ; remember my brethern and sisterin’ that Nī-cöd-emus said marvel not. Oh !—I see before me a great many little boys, ah ! and I wonder as I gaze over them ef they would marvel, ah ! Oh, my dear, ah ! little boys, ah ! If I could only git you to think on the wickedness of marvelin’, ah ! ye’d foller the advice o’ Nī-cöd-emus and marvel not, ah ! The other Sunday as I was goin’, ah ! to meetin’, ah ! I saw some boys marvelin’, ah ! They had little round, white and brown, marvels, ah ! and one great, tall, lank-lean-shank-twisted-feller said ‘ I’m fat,’ ah ! which in the face of Gwod and man was a lie. ah ! and then another low an’ stumpy fat an’ dumpy boy, who was ‘n the best o’ health said ‘ I’m dead,’ ah ! which in the face o’ Gwod an’ man was another lie, ah ! Oh ! boys, take warnin’ from these sins, fly from the wrath to come ah ! ah ! in the language o’ my text foller the example o’ Nī-cöd-emus an’ marvel not, ah !”

The dogs had been watching the sledge-hammer-like strokes which fell with wonderful regularity on the stand, and somehow there seemed to be something belligerent about them.

Blunche showed his sharp incisors to Tige, and growled, and Tige returned the compliment. The old feud between the canines was revived, and Asa remembered how he hated Dick Blow and how much Dick liked Tige, so he thought he

might get a little second-hand revenge out of Dick. He stooped over and patting Blunche on the side, said in a whisper :

“Blunche, ye kin jest shake the wool ofen that dog. Go in on yer muscle.”

Receiving the approval of his master Blunches hair rose, and he rose with it. Nothing but the lion-like voice of Mr. Culbertson could have drowned the growls of the dogs. Asa backed Blunche with his foot, and the dogs met half-way. Fierce yelps, sharp growls, screams and scuffles, under the stand, over and over, round and round, swinging, yelling and shaking, and everybody getting out of the way—what a racket! The preacher ceased “marveling,” and made for a window. At this moment the stand went over with a crash, carrying in its fall the only candle, and all was utter darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

ASA'S PA BECOMES A MEDIUM.

WELL, no one was severely hurt in the dog fight, unless it was the dogs themselves. Blunche had a divided ear, and Tige had a sanguinary spot on his nose, and Mr. Culbertson had an echymosed eye. Some of the others had bruised shins from



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"The Preacher ceased 'Marveling' and made for a window."—
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falling over the benches in the general stampede for doors and windows, and others were considerably scratched and squeezed, but fortunately no bones were broken.

Asa managed to get out whole, and spent the next day, Sabbath as it was, in dressing the wounds of his dog. There were some vague suspicions in the neighborhood that Asa was in some way responsible for the dog fight, but of course he resented these slanderous insinuations with the righteous indignation which they justly deserved. Asa had one thing to regret, and that was that the candle went out. The fun of seeing the general stampede, the falling over benches and scrambling for dear life, was all obscured in the darkness.

"Asa," said our hero's pa next day.

"Well, pa," said Asa very meekly—for Asa was always meek when his sire seemed to have vague suspicions of his evil conduct.

"I tell ye, Asa, I half believe you sot them dogs to fightin'."

"Who! me, pa?"

"Yes, you."

"Why ye don't think I'd be that mean, do ye?"

Asa's pa was not without his weak failings and he seemed to almost melt. He was a conscientious man and for worlds would not have accused his little boy wrongfully, and when Asa rubbed

his slightly inclined to a pug nose with his sleeve and said, "Why, pa, I thot' ye hed a better opinion o' me," the old man was willing to yield to him, and said :

"Well, we'll jest consider that yer pa was jokin." But lem me give ye a pinter : ef ye want the dust to 'cumulate in the back o' yer jacket, leave Blunche at home the next time ye go to meetin'!

"I'll tie 'im when I go," Asa declared.

"Guess 'twould be best."

There was no more preaching in the school-house for three weeks, until time for Mr. Caldwell to come round. Asa seemed to have suddenly sobered down to a real good boy. One afternoon he and his sister were in the kitchen together. Asa usually made a confident of Sis, and we must confess it right here, much as we like this pretty but naughty belle of the blue grass region, that she not infrequently helped to shape and put the finishing touch to some of Asa's more refined jokes. It is true that Asa seldom required any assistance in anything he undertook, but when he did he found his sister willing and ready to polish and shape his jokes.

"Sis," said Asa as he sat poking a stick into the spout of the hissing teakettle, "did ye ever see any spiritual rappins?"

"No."

"D'ye think ye'd like to be a medium?"

"No, I want nothin' to do with it," Sis answered, as with her sleeves rolled above her dimpled elbows she busied herself picking the stems off of the large plump strawberries. Reaching over to the pan and helping himself to a handful of the most choice of the berries, Asa said:

"Then ye don't believe in sperits."

"No."

"Neither d'wi 'nless it's some kinds, 'n usully the kind what people puts in jugs 'n bottles. When a man fills hissself full o' sperits and starts through a graveyard on a dark night, more'n likely he'll see the sperits outside o' hissself afore he goes by. But then, Sis, I guess arter all thars somethin' in them speritual rappins'.

"Why, Asa."

"Cos everybody seems a goin' crazy over 'em."

"I guess no one of a very strong mind has gone crazy."

"Oh, yes, they hev, Sis," said Asa solemnly. "Bates nigger Lize's as crazy as a bed bug, 'n ye know she wus a mighty knowin' nigger."

"Oh, Asa, hush."

"Why Sis?"

"Cause it's such nonsense."

"Wall, now, 'taint no sich a thing; why our pa, who ye know's the strongest-minded man 'n the world, may be a b'liever in sperits 'fore long."

"Who, pa, a speritualist? never!"

"Bet ye a dollar he is."

"I won't bet, Asa—"

"Cos ye 'blong t' the meetin, well ef ye'll do's I say, he'll be a b'liever 'n a week."

Sis laughed incredulously, and her pretty fingers flew among the rich tempting berries.

"Will ye do's I say."

"Yes."

"Sure pop?"

"Yes."

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes."

Having administered his oath in his usual form, binding Sis to secrecy, he then revealed to her a plan which made the pretty Clara Mullen laugh until the tears trickled down her pretty little cheeks.

"Oh, Asa, you'll surely be hung," she screamed with merriment.

"Now, Sis, don't ye give me away," said Asa solemnly.

"I wont."

"And ye'll help."

"Yes."

"Well, I'm goin' to see pa about it this very night, 'n I guess he'll consent. I think it'll be all right."

"What, consent to be humbugged?"

"Why, yes, Sis. People never object to bein' humbugged 'n these days, 'n why should pa?"

"Oh, Asa, you're too bad. You'll be the death of us all."

"Well, you see, Sis, I aint a goin' to tell pa he's goin' to be humbugged. When the patent medicine man comes round sellin' burdock root syrup 'n bread pills, he don't go t' work 'n tell pa what 'tis, but jest humbugs 'm without lettin' 'm know it. No'n can be humbugged 'f they know it. I'm goin' to humbug pa, but I aint fool enough t' warn him in advance."

That evening Asa met with his father and mother in the sitting-room instead of worrying the cat, or annoying the cows as was his wont. There was a serious look upon the dear little boy's face which his parents were not slow to discern. What had produced it? They were not exactly alarmed, and yet Mr. Mullen felt just the least bit uneasy.

"Asa, are you well?" his mother asked.

"Yes, ma."

"Well, what makes you look so solemn my dear little boy."

"I was jest a thinkin' 'bout somethin' I've hearn a deal 'bout lately."

"What was 't, Asa?"

"Pa, 'd ye ever hear the spiritual rappins?"

"No."

"D'ye believe in 'em."

"Naw—it's all a humbug, that's all that there is of it."

"Id'n know, pa."

"Ye don't?" and Abram Mullen fixed his eyes on his son. "What d'ye mean?"

"I've hearn some strange sounds 'n noises which I can't zactly understand some way. Dun know what they mean."

"Oh, pshaw," said Mr. Mullen quickly. "I don't believe thar's anything in 't."

"Well, pa, 'f ye'd a heern the knockin' and thumpin' round the barn 't I have, ye'd think quite different I'm sure."

"'Twas pecker woods."

"No 'twarnt—pecker woods don't be knockin' an' thumpin' round o' nights, 'n I know 'twarnt nobody, cos I couldn't see any one round 'tall."

"Well, what wuz it, Asa?"

"Sperits."

"Fudge."

Asa sat for a long time with the air of an injured boy who intended to be good. "Naw, pa, ef ye heerd 'em yerself, wouldn't ye believe in 'em."

"I dun no. I think I'd find out some way o' known 't they wus no sperits."

"Ye wouldn't do it though, cos ye can't see sperits, but pa 'f ye'll some o' these times hev Sis fix the big table fur ye arter supper, when no 'n but you an' ma are 'bout an' then put yer

hand on't an' ax ef thars any sperits present please rap, 'n they'd rap, would ye 'bleve it?"

Mr. Mullen grew very thoughtful and said that he didn't know, but under such extraordinary circumstances he might be forced to the conviction that there was some truth in the "sperits."

Asa went back to Sis triumphant, and the two sat right down and took a good hearty laugh in advance. It was simply an overdraft on their prospective bank account of fun which was soon to follow and more than balance for it. Asa and Sis were both solemn that day, very solemn. Asa scrutinized the kitchen extension table very carefully. It was made with a large hollow box beneath, in which leaves or dishes could be stored. The two centre leaves turned back revealing the opening.

"It'll do," Asa declared.

That night at supper Asa told his pa that he was going over to stay all night with Tom Thrasher. Mr. Mullen and his wife exchanged glances with each other and looked somewhat relieved.

"Sis, ye can bring the big table in the settin'-room," said Abram Mullen. "I want to read some to-night, 'an the candle sets better on't than on the stand."

For some strange, inexplicable reason Asa got choked on the pieces of bread he was eating, and had to leave the dining-room. When the supper

things were cleared away and the heavy old table pushed up in one corner Sis called Aunt Sukey and Jude to help her and had it carried to the sitting-room.

"Dis table am awful heavy," said Aunt Sukey.

"Mus' hab somefin' in dat box," suggested Jude.

"It's only the dishes," said Sis, fearing they might take it into their heads to give it a thorough examination.

"Well, den, ef dem ain't de heaviest dishes what I eber saw 'n my life," said Jude.

But the table was carried from the kitchen to the sitting-room.

"Where is Asa?" asked Mr. Mullen.

"Didn't he say he was going over to stay all night with Tom Thrasher?" Sis evasively asked.

"Oh, yes, he did. Well, I guess he's gone. Asa is a good boy, but he's a leetle inclined to be mischievous," said Mr. Mullen. "Now bring in the candle, Sis, so 't I kin read, 'n you may go to bed."

Sis lighted a candle for her father and placed it on the table. Her face seemed very red, and for some strange, unaccountable reason she seemed liable to strangle, but she got out of the room without her parents observing how strangely she was affected.

Asa's pa picked up a newspaper, adjusted his glasses and seemed to be reading, but evidently he was not much interested in the subject, for the paper was upside down. Occasionally he cast furtive glances at his wife, and she returned them. They both looked about the room with a strange sense of guilt or superstition about them.

At last Mr. Mullen folded his paper as though he had done reading and laid it down upon the table. He placed his spectacles in their case, and looking at his wife, said :

“Ma—d'ye reckin' thars anything it 't?”

“In what?” asked Aunt Susan in as careless, off-hand manner as she could assume. The woman with her spectacles upside down had been dropping stitches and taking them up, in her endeavors to knit all evening.

‘In speritual rappings.’

“I dun know.”

“Well, I don't.” He sighed and, after a moment, said : “Guess it ain't no harm to lay one's hands on the table.” He placed his hands on it and said : “Ef thar 'ar any sperits present, please rap.”

Two distinct hollow raps came from the centre of the table. Both Mr. Mullen and his estimable wife sprang to their feet, upsetting their chairs as they did so. But they sat down once

more, and as far as was possible regained their coolness.

"Did you hear nuthin'?" asked Mr. Mullen, his hair standing almost on end.

"I tho't I heard a rappin'."

"It must o' been a cat."

"Try again."

A second time he placed his hand upon the table and received three loud and distinct raps. They were not so much frightened as before, but Mr. Mullen fixing his eyes upon his wife said :

"Thars somethin' in this."

"Ax 'em ef thars a medium in the room," said Mrs. Mullen.

"Ef thars a medium in the room, please rap?"

Rap-rap-rap. Three distinct raps as if coming from the knuckle of a skeleton rang out from the sepulchral-like vault of the table.

"Ef I'm a medium rap three times."

Rap-rap-rap, came the three distinct raps.

"Blazes, Susan, I'm a medium, too," said Mr. Mullen, starting to his feet, gazing with widely distended eyes at his wife.

That evening passed in mystery; in conversation with the dead. The knocking or rapping language is the primitive language of the spiritualists. It even antedates the slate writing. By means of this language Mr. Mullen and his wife conversed with long deceased friends.

Next day Mr. Mullen asked Uncle Johnny

Crocket, Mr. Daniels, and Allen Tucker to come to his house, bring their wives and spend the evening. They agreed to, and when Asa learned they were coming, asked another leave of absence. Knowing he would play some practical joke on the ghosts if he stayed, his parents consented.

Night came and Mr. Mullen had the heavy old table brought in the sitting-room, that he might astonish his neighbors with his wonderful performances as a medium. Sis was asked to come in also, and be a witness to the invisible mysteries of the other world.

She came; stuffing her handkerchief in her mouth and keeping out of the direct line of vision of either of her parents. Everybody was wonder-struck at the awful rapping. Everybody had some dead freind to ask about. The candle burned low and the rapping grew decidedly loud and ominous. The good, awe-stricken people shivered, though it wasn't the least bit cold. Having asked about every dead person of whom they had ever heard and read, they asked about the living:

"Where is George Maxley?" asked Uncle Johnny Crocket. The spirit by raps spelled out "*Kaleforny.*" "Where was Tom Crocket?" "*Oamahaw.*"

"Where is Asa Mullen?" The dear little boy's pa asked.

“Under the bunk, by jingo,” cried a voice from under the centre of the table,—the leaves parted in the centre, flopped back, and a grinning face appeared. Sis came very near dying, but Asa’s pa after the first shock of horror and astonishment had passed, began hunting for his well-used strap. Asa in the meanwhile scrambled from the box under the table where he had been playing spirit, and got away. Uncle Abram found his hands full in explaining to his neighbors that he was no party to the joke.

CHAPTER VIII.

ASA WINS A RACE.

“HELLO ! Nick, ’s thet you ?”

The speaker was Asa Mullen, and he hailed a tall, slender man, mounted on a tall, slender horse, trotting along the road which wound around the deep basin-like hole in the earth, from which issued the steam and vapor of the Devil’s Teapot. Summer had waxed and waned and autumn was approaching, though in this semi-tropical region autumn has few chilling blasts, and is not dreaded as in other countries. The sky was clear and the green on the trees was only of a richer, deeper tint, it could scarce be said to be tinged with brown. The hills and

woodland in Kentucky must be seen to be appreciated, and must be seen by an appreciative eye. Asa was as usual barefooted, with his large straw hat on his head. He carried a fishing rod in one hand, and kept the other free to throw stones at the birds with which the woods were filled. He evidently knew the man he had accosted and was on familiar terms with him, for the stranger drew rein, and turning up the broad brim of his hat, said :

“Why, hello Ace, is that you?”

“Yes, sir-ree, big as life,” was the response of this incorrigible specimen of Young America.

“I’m glad I found you, Asa,” said the man, who was dressed something like a sporting gentleman of the blue grass regions.

“Why?” and Asa thrust his tongue in his cheek while his blue eyes sparkled with innate mischief.

“Asa, I’m in trouble ; can’t you help me out?”

Asa seemed to think he could if any person could. He assured Mr. Nicholas Collins that he was always ready to give a helping hand in an hour of need. Nick Collins was a country sport. He attended all the fairs, drove and rode fast horses and bet heavily on the races. He had been tolerable fortunate, never losing any large amount, and always managing to rake in a pretty good haul in the end.

Nick threw his left leg over the horn of his



“‘Under the bunk,’ cried a voice from the center of the table.”—
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saddle and taking out his knife began paring his finger nails.

"Well, Asa, it's this,—there's a Lexington sport been out here and he's made some purty big banter on his horse, an' I warnt agoin' to be backed down by him, an' so I made a bet."

"When's the race to come off?" asked Asa with his head bowed thoughtfully.

"Next Chuseday, and I want ye to ride fur me. I expect he'll have somethin' that'll down me, but I warnt agoin' to let him back me out 'n that way."

"How much did ye put up."

"Five hundred on a side."

"What ye bettin' on?"

"No particular animal. I jest bet I'd hev one that'd beat his Lexington horse."

"That's good," said Asa nodding his head in approval.

"It's a runnin' race, is it?"

"No; it's a trottin' race."

"That's all right," said Asa.

"Asa, I want you to ride for me. Can't ye slip away and come over an' do it?"

Asa studied for a moment, then asked:

"Where's it goin' to be?"

"At Brownville."

"Well, yes, I reckon so. What ye goin' to trot, Nick?" and Asa thoughtfully pushed his hat

back from his broad, high brow, and thrust one hand into his pocket in a meditative mood.

"I'm goin' to trot my big roan."

"Don't ye do 't, Nick?" said Asa in an awful tone of warning.

"Why?" asked Nick in some alarm.

"Cos don't ye do it. Ef ye do ye'll git scooped by that Lexington feller. Better take the advice o' some one who knows 'bout sich things, 'n don't ye trot old roan."

"Why, Asa, that's the best I can do. I've got none other that I can begin to keep up."

"Wall, then, jest lem me alone to find an animil. I think I know somethin' 'at can trot better 'n the Louisville feller's hoss."

"What 'll ye find, Asa?"

"Don't ye never mind about that now," said Asa with an air of one who was equal to almost any emergency. "I guess I know jest what I'm about, and I'll be on hand with a animil that'll clean out that Lexington feller's hoss. Whar's the race to be?"

"At Brownville."

"That's five miles from pa's. I've got to git some excuse to go there next Chuesday; but I kin fix that. Who's the Louisville feller?"

"Sammy Flaxseed."

"Why, by jing, that's one o' Sis's beaux. Well, won't it be fun though t' fix him."

"I wish we could beat 'im."

"We kin."

"I've heerd that he has a horse that can out-trot anything in Lexington."

"I'll bring a animil that can trot faster'n a steam engine."

Nick Collins seemed to have the most implicit confidence in Asa Mullen. He was satisfied that Asa knew of some animal in his part of the neighborhood that could trot; but it might be that Asa was over-estimating the animal's value.

He came in two days again and had a private interview with Asa, and they went together and had a private interview with Tom Thrasher, Asa's chum. Tom thought that Asa had not misrepresented matters, and Mr. Nick Collins left pretty well satisfied that everything would come out all right. The blue grass region produces the best blood in America, and as you may find the most perfect beauty in a hovel, so you may sometimes find the finest animals the property of the poor man. At any rate Nick was satisfied, and went home laughing in his sleeve at the way he was to take in the chap from Louisville.

The morning for the race came. Brownville, a small insignificant cross-roads post-office, with two or three odd houses, a blacksmith shop, and a general country store, was noted for its loafers. Here the aged and young assembled, the former to discuss and the latter to listen to the discussion of the political questions of the day. A

horse race at Brownville was sure to bring a large crowd of idlers, and sometimes they were not the most genteel, and inoffensive people in old Kentucky. It was nothing uncommon at those races for whisky to flow freely, and blow-to be struck, or knives and pistols used. Half a-dozen other horses had been entered, and the race promised to be an exceedingly rare one.

Sammy Flaxseed, who backed the Lexington horse, was on hand. Mr. Flaxseed was one of those microcephalous gentleman who is very precise in everything;—a dandy, a genteel sport, and particularly interested in dogs and horses. He had an affected way of talking, and seemed habitually short of breath.

“Well, ah! Mr. Collins,” said Sammy, rubbing his small hands together, “isn’t it about time for the race?”

“No; lacks half-a-nour.”

“Is your animal on the ground?”

“He’ll be here in time.”

“I’m afraid he will not, ah! Mr. Collins.”

“Ef he ain’t, the money’s yours,” said Collins, uneasily glancing about and muttering to himself, “why ’n the thunder don’t Asa come on?”

The race track had been made, raked and leveled and everything was ready. Sportsmen had been for the last half-hour leading horses along up and down the track to familiarize them with it. The time was about up. Horses were

called to the line, and still the animal on which Collins had staked his money had not appeared.

Just as the last horse toed the mark, Asa Mullen, mounted on a large red bull, trotted up and wheeled into line. There was a murmur of surprise and indignation.

"That's my animal he's on," cried Nick. "Give the word."

The word to go was given, and the horses and bull sped away on the track. The bull trotted well, and showed excellent training. But a wild unearthly bellow caused every horse to break and sent them scampering in every direction, while Asa Mullen rode straight to the goal, and was declared the winner.

"It's not fair; it's not fair," cried Flaxseed. "I, ah! did not bet on a bull."

"No, but ye bet on a animal," said Nick, "an' my animal's won."

"'Taint fair!" shouted a dozen others, and in a moment pistols and knives were flourished in the air. Such scenes in Kentucky are not always got up just for fun, and the most apprehensive people got out of the way.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GHOST OF MIRALDO'S HOLLOW.

THINGS began to assume a lively aspect. Had Sammy Flaxseed been the only one offended by the practical joke of Nick Collins through Asa Mullen, Nick might have come out very well ; but as he had made half-a-dozen other horses fly the track by the bellowing bull, their several owners, and ten times as many friends of owners, felt that they had been outraged.

The melee began by some one striking out and hitting some one. Then somebody struck back, and whack, whack, with wonderful rapidity thy blows fell. Two or three were down. Sammy Flaxseed's silk hat was knocked from his head, and he sent whirling head over heels into a gutter.

It is a remarkable fact that when men get into a fight, they strike about them rather careless ; and then they hit so hard that if a fellow chances to be in the way he don't hardly know whether it's a lightning express or a cannon ball that struck him.

Asa was of course enjoying the fun. He felt real sorry that Nick, his friend, got his face most beautifully punched, but he didn't care one cent

about Sis' Lexington beau getting knocked into the gutter and having his clothes spoiled.

"He orter had more sense'n to wear fine clothes to a hoss race," Asa declared.

The justice and the constable came up in time to prevent any serious trouble, and after a drink all round everybody shook hands and agreed to be friends, talked over other races and other fights and compared them with the present little affair.

There was one who took no part in the general jollification after the fight, and that was Mr. Sammy Flaxseed.

"Oh—ah! it is perfectly horrid," he said to himself as he brushed the mud off his clothes. "My hat, ah! is gone, and I can't never get my clothes clean any mo'; just when I intended calling and spending a pleasant time with that dawling Miss Mullen, ah! That fello' from Louisville will get the start of me, ah! I greatly fear; but I must go back to Lexington until these horrible bruises on my head are healed, before I call on my adored."

The fellow from Louisville would beyond a doubt have been very thankful for the event which temporarily removed a rival as dangerous as Sammy Flaxseed. The following Friday evening brought our friend Paul Webster again to the rural home of Mr. Mullen. To say that Paul was dead in love with the beautiful Clara would

be a mild way of expressing his feelings. He had determined time and again to propose to her, but somehow he had always failed when the proper time came. He seemed to choke up, and was really never so dashful as when in her presence.

Paul had done all he could to make friends with Asa. The promised firecrackers had come all right, and Asa got his jacket tanned for using them in the way he had indicated.

When Paul came this time he went to Asa with a nice present brought from Louisville, and promised him a pocket rifle if he would never perpetrate another trick upon him. Asa promised of course; what boy wouldn't promise anything for a pocket rifle? Asa meant to keep his bargain when he made it and entered into the agreement with his sisters best beau, as he styled Mr. Paul Webster; but Asa was yet to learn that the spirit was willing and the flesh was weak.

Paul was bashful as usual. That natural timidity, or rather modesty, which had been allowed to over-develop itself into bashfulness, he seemed as if he could never overcome.

But everything seemed propitious on this visit, and he was sure that this was the time to terminate all and lay his heart at Clara's feet. Surely she had never seemed so lovely in all her life as now. Her laughing, roguish blue eyes seemed to have a depth of tenderness in them which he

had never noticed before. She was so gracious as to devote all her time to him, and though she did laugh at some of his awkward blunders, it was a sympathetic sort of a laugh. She was dressed as became her beauty, and her golden hair which seemed to radiate with sufficient brilliance to dispel the darkest gloom, hung in a mass of flashing ringlets about her shoulders. Her saucy lips were like ruby and when she spoke there never was seen such perfect teeth of pearl. She seemed, as she sat there before her lover, laughing and smiling and showering dimples upon him, to provoke him to madness. Every time those ruby lips parted with a smile they seemed to say :

“ Wouldn't you like to kiss me now ? ”

Poor Paul, we feel sorry for him, who would not? He was sometimes sure his love was returned, and sometimes he was not.

That evening he met Asa trying to break a calf for a riding horse, and said :

“ Asa, I want to ask you a question, and I want you keep this matter a profound secret.”

“ I'll do't, ye bet,” said Asa, jerking the refractory calf to its knees. “ Woa, ye fool—ye aint a goin' to git away from me s' easy as ye think.” Then, addressing Paul, he added : “ Oh, yes, Mr. Webster, me an' you're solid. We're old pards, we're ; an' what ever ye give me I'll keep, ye better bet.”

“ Well, Asa, keep this, for I would not have it known for the world.”

You may call Paul a fool, and we'll stand between you and danger. Paul will not be offended if you should do so, for to tell the truth he has long since found out himself that he was a fool. Every man living has discovered that he was a fool when in love, if he should have sense enough to make the discovery. Paul had sense enough, and owns up like a man now.

“ What is 't, Mr. Webster ! I'll keep'er,” said Asa.

“ I just wanted to ask you if you thought your sister liked me ?” said Paul, feeling very much as if he had made a fool of himself the moment he uttered the words.

Asa cocked his hat on one side of his head, stuck his big toe into a craw-fish hole, and glancing askance at Paul said :

“ Well, boss, bein' as ye put yer question straightfor'ud, ye see, I'll make a panted answer. I b'lieve Sis does kinder hev a hankerin' arfter ye ; but she's got so many beaux that it's sometimes mighty hard to tell which one she's goin' to tumble to. But my candid 'pinion is 'f them blasted Lexington dewds warn't in the way ye'd hev a fust-rate show. But why don't ye go right in ? Ax her, that's the way to' find out,” said Asa with some little contempt for a man who was not brave enough to propose.

"Oh, Asa, what would she do?" said the bashful lover.

"Couldn't more 'n kill ye."

"But she might drive me away. She might never allow me to see her again."

"Wall, that'd be a deal better 'n settin' on the ragged edge o' despair and not knowin' whether ye die with yaller jaunders or git fat. Sometime, when yer with Sis, jest pop the question, that's the way I'd do. She won't do no wuss'n laff at ye; ye kin surely stand that, I reckon."

I was this laugh which frightened out poor Paul. He could not bear to have her make fun of him, and felt that he would surely die if she did.

But Paul took Asa's advice to himself and pondered well over it. He, of course, was to stay until Monday at the home of his adored. It was not uncommon for young fellows to come courting in the country, and stay two or three days.

Saturday afternoon he and Clara took a stroll about the dear old homestead. Every tree, and rock, and bush, and twig, and stump, and hill, and thorn patch, seemed to have become endeared to our hero. It was the home—the birthplace of the fairest being he had ever known. It was an earthly paradise to him.

What could be more pleasant than to stroll down those paths carpeted with green vervet grass, to see the Autumn flowers and fruits on every hand, to hear the birds filling the air with

their melody, and above all, to have that earthly angel at his side, her sweet voice sweeter than the birds, or sparkling cascades. It was loveliness to perfection. It was perpetual and ecstatic bliss to our gentleman friend from Louisville. Sing on sweet birds, murmur on gentle brooks. Paul Webster could live forever in this present state, and ask no better heaven. In spite of himself he found his tongue wagging in a strange, unaccountable way. He spoke something which seemed to issue spontaneously from a badly confused brain, and then he heard silvery laughter like rippling peals of music which convinced him that the fair being at his side was more terrestrial than angelic.

Did ever the rural districts of old Kentucky look half so fair as now. He never saw pastures so green, shades so cooling, and waters rippling over tiny cascades so pure. They wandered on, and on, seeming to be in a fairy-land, and Paul not knowing or caring whither their footsteps led. They had descended into a sort of a valley or ravine, and were strolling along, he in a state of rapture hardly to be described.

"D' you know where we are?" she asked, as they at last paused near enough to a great dashing waterfall to be within ear shot of the tremendous roar.

"No, Miss Mullen, I—I don't know that I care."

"Are you not afraid of ghosts?"

"No—are you?"

"Not much."

"Are there any ghosts here?" he asked.

"Yes—this is Miraldo's Hollow."

"Miraldo's Hollow,—I don't know that I ever heard of it before."

"Havn't you? Well its haunted."

"Oh, yes; I guess I have heard Asa speak of it."

"Didn't he say it was haunted?"

"Perhaps he did."

"It is said to be haunted by a Spaniard who was murdered here a great many years ago, when this was only a backwoods country."

Paul had it on his tongue's end to ask if it was not still a backwoods country, but fearing that it might offend the being whom he loved so dearly he refrained. She went on to tell him an old legend of how Miraldo had been mysteriously murdered, and of the supposition that he had a large amount of treasure buried somewhere and came back regularly to visit this earth. Miraldo's waterfall was a place where a considerable stream of water plunged over a bluff about thirty feet high into a pool, and then found an outlet between some rocks. There was usually a fine spray about this cataract, and in the spray the spirit form of the murdered Miraldo was often seen. His groans and cries when the night was

dark and the wind howled dismally down the ravine caused the listeners blood to run cold. Strange sights had been seen in this hollow, and strange sounds had been heard. Spirits and demons, when the storm raged wild, seemed shrieking and fighting in the air.

But what cared he for Miraldo's ghost, so long as he was with the being he adored. There was something in the atmosphere which seemed to inspirit him with a new life and vigor. His tongue was unloosed, and he talked more freely to the object of his affections than he ever had before.

Their talk breathed of love. It was not of love, but was love itself. He felt that he was made a new man. There were no vows, save the vows made with two pairs of loving eyes. Neither Paul nor Clara remembers what was said. Both were too deeply absorbed in each other's society to take heed of the flight of time. The sun dipped down behind the western horizon, and from out the east there peeped twinkling stars. The dark gray shadows in the valley grew deeper and deeper until night had set in, and still the lovers were all unconscious. All at once Clara, uttering a scream, started up, and cried :

"Oh, look ! look Paul, it's there now !"

"What is it, where ?" he asked.

"Miraldo's ghost."

Paul Webster had never known what fear was before. He could have charged a battery, faced a wild lion or tiger of the jungle, but that white-robed figure which seemed floating through the air toward them was more than flesh and blood could bear.

"In God's name go away!" yelled Paul.

Sis gave utterance to a shriek and swooned, and Paul was really so ignoble as to wheel about and start to run, when a voice called out:

"Hold on thâr, ef yer that big a coward ye needn't never expect to be my brother-in-law."

Mr. Webster in his horror had fallen upon his knees, clasped his hands, and was puzzling his brain to think of some prayer he had known.

A peal of laughter from the insensible girl convinced him that he had been made the subject of a trick, and with all the grace he could command he returned to where the pretty Clara Mullen was holding her hands to her sides, while the tears trickled down her pretty cheeks. The ghost was disrobing itself, and had quite an unghostlike appearance since he had discovered who it was.

"Asa," said Paul sharply, "is this keeping your promise with me?"

"I ain't a doin' nothin'," Asa answered.

"Miss Mullen, hadn't I better take you home, the night air might give you cold."

Sis assented, and still convulsed with laughter

at the figure cut by her luckless beau she took his arm.

Asa followed along behind, wondering how many stripes he would get for this.

"Guess I better compromise this thing with Sis' best beau afore he gits where pa is, or my hide won't hold shucks," thought Asa.

Before Paul reached the house Asa expressed a desire to see him on a private matter; and when Sis' best beau had conducted her to the house he returned to Asa. The boy informed him that Sis' second beau Billy Smalltrash, who was a Lexington dude with an old gold mustache, was coming next Saturday to see Sis, and if Mr. Webster would just let up on him, and not say anything to his pa about the ghost of Miraldo's Hollow, he, Asa, would sell that dude out in such a way he would never come back again.

Of course Paul entered into the agreement.

CHAPTER X.

ASA TAKES BILLY SMALLTRASH SNIPING.

ASA was not telling a falsehood when he informed Sis' best beau, as he called Mr. Webster, that Billy Smalltrash was coming out from Lexington to court Sis. On the appointed day Billy came.

Reader, did you ever see a Lexington Kentucky dude? If you ever did, then there would be no need of describing Billy Smalltrash, but for fear you have never had that distinguished privilege we will take it upon ourselves to give you something of the general outline of the man, and the rest your imagination can supply.

The Kentucky dude differs a little from other dudes, and the Lexington dude has distinct individuality. Like all other dudes he parts his hair in the middle, carries an eye-glass, and his coat is cut *a la* swallow-tail, and his pants are tight; but then we think he can talk more and say less than the ordinary dude.

The distinctive difference between a Lexington dude and other dudes is, that the Lexington fellow can lay it onto all dudedom in soft talk. Then he has a dialect peculiar to himself. He can press his hands closer together and whisper soft nothings about nothing. The Lexington dude is born with a yard-stick in his hand; of course he's a counter-jumper. He can handle soft goods to perfection, and chat with a pretty customer in a most entertaining way. But on all solid questions he is a blank.

When Billy Smalltrash arrived at Mr. Mullen's house, it was with a thorough appreciation of his own superiority. He was not troubled with the bashfulness which seemed liable to wreck the hopes of Mr. Webster. He had a superabun-

dance of self-esteem, and had come to the conclusion that out in this backwoods rural Kentucky district, he would be regarded a prodigy in good looks, good dress, and good sense.

When the creature arrived Asa gave it a careful and critical examination, and went to the kitchen where Sis was making pies.

"Well, Sis, he's come," said Asa, "I tell'n' ye, yer Lexington beau, with his old gole mustache, thinks he's old persimmons."

"Now, Asa," her smiling, dimpled face growing serious, "don't you go to playing any tricks."

"Tricks—nuthin," said Asa with a little smile of contempt. "D'ye spose a feller is always goin' to keep hisself in a straight-jacket jest because yer beaux are round. No, I'm not. I b'lieve in everybody being' free."

Half-an-hour later Asa was in the best-room forming the acquaintance of the Lexington dude with the old gold mustache.

Asa could be a very affable young gent when he took a notion to, and though he with his bare feet and frowsled hair was abhorrent to the refined Lexington dude, Mr. Smalltrash determined to tolerate him, because he was the brother of that adorable creature whom he loved almost to desperation.

Gradually Asa drew the Lexington dude out, until he got him out of the house and quite to

himself in the front yard, and down to the orchard, where he unburdened his soul to him.

"Did ye ever go a huntin'?" he asked.

"Oh, ah, yes, my deah boy, I've gone aw' huntin' a great many times, aw—indeed I have."

"I like ter hunt."

"Aw! so do I. I never go for nuthin' nyther. I eyther bring in some game, aw! or I stay out till I am more successful."

"Well, boss, I guess yer fond o' huntin' aint ye?"

"Aw! very; very fond of hunting, my deah boy aw! I am very successful, too."

"Did you ever hunt snipes?"

"Aw, yes, I've shot snipes."

"Long bill snipes, or them kind what we call plovers."

"Well, I guess may be they were called plovers."

"Oh, shucks; ye don't know nuthin bout snipes then," said Asa with a sort of a half-formed sympathy for the dude's ignorance. "Ye don't know what fun is till ye go snipin'. We don't hunt 'em with guns."

"You don't, aw! then you hunt 'em with do'gs."

"No, not with dawgs neither."

"How do you hunt them then?" asked the dude with no little curiosity depicted in his manner.

"We hunt them with bags."

"With bags, aw! what do you mean, aw? I have hunted with elephants, dogs, horses, and almost every conceivable way any one can think, but I never yet hunted with bags."

"I though ye didn't know very much 'bout snipes when ye war a talkin', cos ye see whenever an ole snipe-hunter like me hears o' snipes, the next thing he thinks about is bags."

"Aw, my young friend, how do you hunt snipes?"

"After night."

"Is that so?"

"Ef it hadn't a bin I wouldn't a told ye so. Course we hunt snipes after night, an' do it with bags, an' torches. Pine torches are best."

"What kind of bags do you use?" asked the astounded dude,

"Any kind o' bags 'll do, so they got a good wide open mouth. We've got one to the barn 's the very thing. Every time Sis' beau frum Louisville comes here a sparkin' he goes out 'an bags a dozen or two snipes for pa. Pa's remarkable fond o' snipes."

The Lexington dude bit his lip in vexation. He had realized that the fellow from Louisville had been leading them all in the race for the hand of the fair Clara, and had long wondered at it. Unlike most dudes Mr. Billy Smalltrash had the ability to reason. True it was a very

weak faculty and was exercised in a very weak manner, but then it was sufficiently developed to be called a faculty. His conclusions were in many instances erroneous, but he had a way of arriving at them. He concluded that it must be the snipes which Mr. Paul Webster had bagged for the old people that had all along given him the inside track.

Asa helped the matter along by declaring that Sis, too, was very fond of snipes, an' she had called Mr. Webster her best beau because he had succeeded in bringing in so many.

"Cawnt you learn me to catch snipes," asked Billy Smalltrash.

"Oh, yes; me 'n Tom Thrasher kin do it."

"It's such a pity we're going to have a stawmy night—" sighed Mr. Smalltrash, casting an anxious glance at the threatening clouds above him.

"Why?" asked Asa in astonishment.

"Because we could have gone out this very night and got a bag full of snipes."

"Oh, shucks, ye don't know nuthin' 'bout snipin," said Asa. "Why ye can't git 'em to go in the bags only of a stormy night. All ye'd hev to do to-night would be to take yer place where we'd put ye, en' hold the bag open. The torches kinder blind 'em, an' we kin drive 'em anywhere we want to, don't ye see?"

Of course the dude could see, and the end of

of it was he consented to steal out with Asa and Tom that very night, and go sniping.

"Now, don't ye say a word 'bout it to pa," said Asa earnestly. "Cos ye see pa's a gitten old and cranky, an' he's got it in his head that it'll make a boy sick to git out in the rain,—pshaw; it jist makes him grow."

"But, aw, won't I get wet."

"Naw—take an umbrella."

A man who wouldn't go through fire and flood for the beautiful Clara Mullen was not worthy of winning her, and the result was that Mr. Smalltrash resolved to brave the storm and run the risk of spoiling his fine clothes in order to get the snipes for the old people.

No sooner had Asa Mullen perfected his arrangements with Billy Smalltrash, than he set out to confer with his chum Tom Thrasher, and lay down to him the part he was to play.

The boys held a meeting in the woodshed, and if they had been laying a plan to quietly seize the government and hurl the ruling powers out of existence, they could not have been more particular about it. Asa never did anything half-way, and Tommy was thoroughly drilled; then Asa went home.

As had been predicted that day, the night set in stormy. A cold, disagreeable, fine rain was falling, the wind soughed through the tree tops, and howled dismally down the hollows.

Asa pretended to go to bed. He was to sleep in the same room with Mr. Smalltrash that night, and he had not been in the room getting the bag ready long, before the door opened and the Lexington dude entered.

"Hadn't we better give it up, aw?" he asked.

"Give up nuthin'," growled Asa. "Ef ye ain't got more sand 'n that in ye, ye'd better leave here; ye'll not stand any show at all."

The unfortunate Billy Smalltrash was forced to engage in an undertaking at which his sensitive nature revolted. It was not raining much, Asa assured him. A low whistle at the window warned him that Tom Trasher was waiting and ready.

They escaped through the back door. Oh, how cold, how dark and dreary the night was. Billy Smalltrash thought he had never seen a more disagreeable night than this. He was soon very damp, very cold, and wanted to go back; but for five miles they wandered, and then halted on the verge of a great precipice.

"Here, hold the bag," said Asa, putting a bag in his hand. The rain began beating faster, and it grew colder. Mr. Smalltrash trembled and wished himself in bed. "We'll go now and drive in the snipes."

"Let me go," said Billy Smalltrash.

"No, stay right here. Ye'd fall an' break yer neck, don't move no way at all."



“You stay here: we’ll go and drive in the snipes.”—Page 102.

The cruel boys then stole away, leaving the Lexington dude alone in the rain and darkness, holding the bag.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. DALLYRIPPLE ENRAGED.

THE night was excessively dark. Billy Small-trash was one of those peculiarly constituted individuals who are afraid in the dark. He had always been afraid when a child, and now that he was a man, he was still afraid.

Alone in a vast forest, unable to see a pace before him, he stood restless, uneasy in the rain which pelted down upon him. Asa had laid the umbrella aside, so the dude could hold the bag better, assuring him that in such favorable weather for sniping they would soon have it full of snipes, but that an umbrella would be in the way.

Tom Thrasher, who was exceedingly well drilled, took the umbrella under his arm as they marched away.

The lonely dude stood under the dripping trees, and watched the light of the torch which the boys carried, as they wandered about among the breaks and hills occasionally whistling for snipes. Alexander Selkirk never watched the departure of the vessel which left him alone on the Island of Juan Feruandez with more helpless

despair, than did poor Billy Smalltrash watch that pine torch.

"But they will return driving the snipes soon," he reasoned. "This is the way they catch snipes beyond a doubt. Oh, how I wish they'd bring in a great bag full, aw ! wouldn't I get away with the Louisville fellah ?"

The dude actually became almost happy notwithstanding his distressing situation. A dude can love—there's no question about it, for he has been tested too often. Poor dude with his weak head and strong imagination, his refined taste for tight trowsers and silk hats, and hair parted in the middle. There is no question but that he can love. But his love brings him more misery than it does other people. He finds an additional burden on his hands, and a dude can not bear many burdens.

Poor Billy Smalltrash thought he was really making a martyr of himself for Miss Clara Mullen. He cared not that his head and face were becoming soaked with cold rain, but it made his heart ache to realize that his fine silk hat, which he prided so highly, was becoming ruined. He cared not so much that his body was wet and he shivered with cold, as his new clothes were becoming soiled by the rain.

"Why don't the boys come back ?" he sighed.

He listened, hoping to catch some faint footfall that might indicate their return. For some reason

he never for a moment entertained a thought that he had been made the subject of a practical joke.

But the boys came not back. The torch disappeared and then all was blackness. It seemed to poor Billy Smalltrash that the night was so dark that one might take a piece of chalk and write their name on the atmosphere. The rain fell in a sort of a drizzle which increased slowly, but never amounted to a torrent or flood. It is those slow rains that seem to wet a fellow through to his very bones. It seemed to our unfortunate dude that even the marrow in his bones were frozen.

"Why-y-y-y d-d-d-on't the b-b-boys come on w-w-w-with the snipes," he stammered. His teeth chattering with the chill the rain had produced. "I-I-I wonder i-i-i-if they are g-g-g-going to l-l-leave me here a-a-all night with the b-b-b-bag to hold."

"He was very tired. He was aching with cold, and his sensitive nature all out of patience with the recollection that his new silk hat had been ruined by the rain.

"Oh-h-h-oh, I wish I w-w-w-w-was in bed."

He yawned, for he was so chilled that he was growing sleepy. Then he bethought him that if he had the umbrella it would enable him to keep off the rain, and he began to think of looking for it; but to his horror he remembered that right

before him, not three feet away was a vast chasm. To move a step farther would be to meet a terrible death.

What should he do? He got confused, and in turning about really forgot which direction the chasm was.

"Oh, Lawd," sighed the Lexington dude, "what am I to do if the boys don't come back? I know I shall be killed. The scamps took away all the torch there was, and I am alone in the dark."

How much he would have given (providing he had had it to give) for a flash of lightning at that moment, is perhaps beyond the powers of an ordinary mathematician to calculate. But this time no friendly blaze came to either reveal the horrors of his situation, nor show him the means of extricating himself from his dilemma.

Had he been totally blind he could not have been more helpless than he was at that moment.

The boys had been gone fully an hour, and to the agonized Lexington dude it seemed ten hours. He was certain that enough cold water had run down his back to overflow the Ohio. The dude at last began, figuratively speaking, to "smell a mice." That he had been the victim of a trick seemed possible.

It might be that those boys who had guided him to this place had fallen down some precipice and broken their precious necks; but it was far more probable that they were at that very

moment at their homes, and in their beds asleep. Now the dude began to curse himself for a fool, a very uncommon thing for a dude to do. There are few in dudedom who can ever arrive at that supreme point.

Well, another hour was passed by the dude, alternately standing and squatting. He had made a cloak of the bag, and was himself the only game who had been bagged. The wind rose and howled dismally down the great deep ravines or whistled among the tree tops. The dude seemed freezing. The dude's blood is never very thick, and his slender legs seemed to be two wooden sticks.

"Oh, Lawd, what am I to do?" he sighed.

We suppose that question has been asked in this language before. Nearly every one when they have exhausted their own brains and find nobody else at hand who can answer their question call on the Lord. It makes no difference whether they pretend to believe in a Supreme Being or not, they call on Him when they find all earthly aid failing.

Billy Smalltrash was a skeptic, because it sounded big to him to be above such silly nonsense as believing in the Bible, or the doctrine of Churches. He liked to be reckoned as a man of intelligence, and one who delved into science for himself, rather than a believer in the old foggy notions of the preachers.

Our poor silly dude, like two-thirds if not nine-tenths of the skeptics in the world, did not know the first principles of science. When he realized the horrors of a terrible death about to befall him, he threw himself on his knees, and if his skeptical friends had heard his prayers they would have realized that after all skepticism would not do to pin one's faith on when facing death.

It occurred to him at last that he might crawl away from there, so he began slowly and carefully feeling his way along. He soon found that he was moving in some direction, but to save his life he could not tell exactly where. He was slowly—yes, rather slowly—moving along; for a man crawling on his hands and knees does not go with the rapidity of a lightning express, especially if he has a vague suspicion that there is a yawning chasm before him into which he is liable to plunge.

At last Mr. Smalltrash's hand came in contact with a stick lying across his pathway. He seized it with joy and rose to his feet. At first he hoped it was the umbrella, but in a moment was disappointed. But then an umbrella would do him no good now. Already his silk hat was soaked until it had flattened quite down on his head, and his knees and trowsers were soiled with the rain and mud.

The stick could be used to feel his way along.

The lively imagination of Billy Smalltrash constantly conjured up all sorts of dire calamities. Now he was sure that he was on the verge of some mighty precipice, the next moment he seemed running against a wall of solid stone. It seemed as if goblins and demons thronged the air all about him, and fought and snarled and struggled to see who could torment him most.

Each wild shriek of the wind was to his vivid imagination but the wail of a ghost. He was sure his hair would turn white on account of the horrors to which he was that night exposed.

But he kept on, and on, and on for hours. He ran against trees and fell over logs among rocks, and scrambled through thickets and brambles, until his clothes were torn and his skin lacerated. Still he struggled with might and main to get through the woods.

Going whither, he knew not. He was filled with dread apprehension at every step, and expected at any moment to be hurried to an awful death. The poor unfortunate dude at times became desperate, and with a cry for help, which only the moaning winds answered, in his frenzy he would dash forward until he ran head first against a tree, and was brought up with such force as to send him flat on his back.

After wandering a long time through this wilderness and darkness, and concluding that he

would have some terrible adventures to relate should he ever escape alive, he came to a road.

The shipwrecked mariner on a desert island never hailed the star-spangled banner at the masthead of a ship with more joy than he did this muddy, sloppy road.

He felt his way along it, and fell down half-a-dozen times, until he—had it been light enough to have seen—would have been envied by the hogs. He traveled—it seemed to him—twenty miles along this road, though we are certain it was not near so far, when he came to a fence.

Here he halted and had a second season of rejoicing. It seemed as if he would hardly get over this spell. His life would be spared, and he danced a fisher's horn-pipe; what cared he now if clothes, of which he was so proud, were spattered with mud, his life was saved.

He felt his way along the fence, which a little further on was changed from rails to stone. But that stone fence would lead him somewhere, and there he wanted to go. The home of a poor negro would now be a blessing to the unfortunate dude.

He wandered carefully along the stone fence in all its devious meanderings, and across ditches and hollows, sometimes up and sometimes down, exhibiting more determination than any one would suppose an individual with such slender legs could possess, and finally triumphing.

The last discovery was almost too much for the happy dude. He had come to a barn. Not a very comfortable barn, but a common farmhouse barn.

The out doors were locked, but by climbing a fence he went around on the opposite side of the barn, and there, by feeling along, came to an open door, which he entered.

There all was dark, but a chorus of squeals convinced him that he had entered the domicile of a lot of mules. Then the squealing and kicking business began. All about him, right and left, before and behind, and everywhere, came the whack of heels, and squeal of vicious mules.

Poor Billy Smalltrash was in great peril, and in his dire calamity sprang, wholly by accident, against a ladder. It led upward, and, as his thoughts at that moment were upward, he began to climb. He climbed that ladder with a great deal more alacrity than the author of this narrative has been able to climb the ladder of fame. He reached the top—which the author has not yet done—and there found a large hay-mow, generously filled with dry, warm hay. The mules were still squealing and kicking below, and the dude shivering with cold sunk down in the hay, and as time wore on grew warmer and fell asleep.

He had no idea how long he had been asleep, but it was some hours, when he felt some one

shaking him by the shoulder, and a harsh, rough voice in his ear cried out :

“ See, 'ere, what you doin' here ? ”

“ Hump, aw ! ” ejaculated the dude, starting up and gazing about him in stupified amazement.

“ What yer doin' here. Am I goin' to turn my barn inter a sleepin' place for tramps ? ”

“ Hump ; ” and the dude yawned and rubbed his eyes. He could see the warm sunlight streaming in through the cracks in the barn, and the darkness was dispelled. He looked at the enraged farmer who stood over him with a hayfork in one hand, which he seemed half inclined to drive through him. The dude had risen to a sitting position, and with his hands clasped about his knees sat and yawned. “ I beg pawdon, sir, but cawn you tell me where I am ? ” he asked.

“ Yes ; in my barn ; who are you any way ? ”

“ I, sir, am a gentleman from Lexington. ”

“ Then what are you doing in my barn ? ”

“ Who are you, sir ? ” asked the dude.

“ I'm Farmer Dallyripple, and I've had jest 'bout as many tramps 'bout me 's I'm goin' to hev. I jest got a notion to drive it right through ye. See how muddy ye've got the hay, ye good fur nuthin' dog. ”

It grieved Mr. Billy Smalltrash to have such epithets hurled at him, but Mr. Dallyripple was enraged beyond measure. He grew white in the face and his eyes were murderous. The result

was Billy fell on his knees and implored the farmer's mercy.

"Whar'd ye come from? What ye doin' here, ye good fur nuthin' tramp?"

"I came from Lexington, and I'm a guest of Mr. Abram Mullen," whimpered the dude.

"I don't believe it, but I'll find out whether you're a lyin' or not. It's not a half-a-mile to Mullens, 'n I'll drag ye there by the back of the neck."

Poor unfortunate Mr. Smalltrash was forced to the house of his adored one, where he was hardly recognized by the good people.

When Sis learned how bad he had been treated, she pitied him and promised him he might come back again some time, and her pa whipped Asa within an inch of his life for the trick he had played.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW SAMMY FLAXSEED KILLED THE BEAR.

BILLY SMALLTRASH went to his Lexington home considerably mollified. True his apparel was somewhat dilapidated, and his new plug hat was considerably the worse for wear. He felt that he had been greatly humiliated; but then he had the sweet satisfaction in knowing



"It's not a half mile to Mullens', and I'll drag ye there by the back of the neck."—Page 114.

that Asa had been "soundly larruped," and his sister had sweetly smiled upon him. It was some consolation to him that he would have the privilege of once more coming back as the invited guest of the belle of the Blue Grass Valley.

He did not know that Sammy Flaxseed was to be a visitor at the Mullen homestead, nor that he was running neck and neck with him in the race for the hand of the fair Clara.

Sammy and Billy were great cronies—or pretended to, be—just as dudes usually do when they want to cut each other out. They had always been rivals and the prospects were good for their always being rivals, for one never started at anything that the other did not try to head him off. When Billy met the belle of the Blue Grass Valley—as the neighborhood was generally known—and fell in love with her at a country picnic, he tried hard to keep his rival from knowing it. But it was no use. Sammy seemed to instinctively know that Billy had a sweetheart somewhere, and fell in love with her before he knew her name or what she was like.

But we need not retrograde in our story. If the reader's imagination is at all vivid he can fill in all the blank space; if not, guess at it.

The Saturday following brought Sammy Flaxseed, another one of Sis' store beaux, as Asa

termed them. In fact a Saturday never passed without Sis having a beau. She was such a consummate little flirt, that she could smile on all. There now, I don't know but I have done Sis an unkindness in calling her a flirt. She could hardly be called a flirt, for she had a tender, gentle heart, and would not for the world have done anyone a wrong. She was so full of mischief, so fond of fun that she could not help enjoying herself with these Lexington dudes.

Sammy Flaxseed arrived at the Mullen homestead early in the day. He was determined this time that no horse-race or scheme of any kind should prevent his having an opportunity of seeing his adored Miss Clara.

Asa had really been in no scrape since he took Billy Smalltrash sniping, and he was spoiling for some fun, while his back was itching for another whaling.

"Now, Sammy, yer as good as mine," he said to himself as he wandered about the house, his active mind busy with various plans and schemes for having some sport.

"Lem me see," he said to himself. "Will I take my pardner inter this or had I better work it myself. No—guess I'd better go't alone. Tom's very good pardner in most things, but we've got to play it purty fine on Sammy, or he'll tumble to it, 'n then the things a goner."

Asa was sitting on a large flat stone, which was

used as a stile block, unconsciously nursing his foot.

"Asa, yer pa said dat you mus' come an' help pick up dem apples," said Sambo, interfering with the lad's ruminations.

"Aw ! pick up nuthin'," said Asa who was not well pleased with the interruption.

"Well, yer pa said so," reiterated the darkey.

"Tell pa I've got a sprained ankle, an' I can't work."

"You'd better go'n tell 'im yerse'f. Guess I's got somfin' else to do sides runnin' roun' arter you," growled Sambo.

"Wall, guess I'm not goin' to be driv' roun' by a nigger," retorted our hero in no very enviable manner. "I reckon' you think things hev took a change, do ye ? I'm the nigger this time 'nstead o' you. Yer barkin' up the wrong tree ; so jest scoot, Sambo."

Had Asa had leisure he would not have cared to assist in the work, for as we have had occasion to observe he was not what might be called a lazy boy. He did not like to have his plans interfered with, however, for there would be little time enough to accomplish all he designed.

Sammy Flaxseed was Sis' meanest beau, and he wanted to do him up brown. Asa went hobbling to the house, and informed his pa that he was too lame to work that evening, and that he

really believed his young constitution was broken down, and he was destined to an early grave.

Mr. Mullen was a weak man, and he wilted.

"My dear little boy do you feel so bad?" he asked, putting his hand on Asa's head to see if he had a fever.

"Yes, pa, I do," and if one had heard the impudent young scamp, they would have thought that he was in the last stage of consumption.

"Your head is hot."

"I think, pa, that your little boy should be out in the air more, but my ankle is sprained, and I can't work to-day. Monday I will work for you until I have worn my finger-nails off, sick or well."

Mr. Mullen was not the man to impose on a sick child, and he of course excused Asa from labor until Monday.

"Well, now I've got pa solid," said Asa as he went out into the yard to ruminate, having recovered to a remarkable extent from his lameness. "Next thing to do's to git Sis' beau all right."

Fortune favored him. Mr. Flaxseed as we have seen had a passion for horse-flesh but little less than his love for the belle of the Blue Grass Valley. He wandered to the pastures where Mullen's blooded horses roamed at will, like

nature's noblemen, and gazed on them in wonder and admiration.

Asa saw the dude, as he delighted to call all of Sis' store beaux, and made his way to him with all the speed his discretion would allow.

"I say, mister, d'ye ever hunt any?" he asked in a very earnest manner.

Sammy Flaxseed, who had always really prided his skill and ability as a hunter, answered:

"Yes, of course I have, boy; why I am one of the greatest huntah's since the days of Nimrod—ah!"

"Did ye ever kill a bar."

"Kill a b'ar; ah—well, no, ah! I never exactly killed a b'ar, but I've shot almost every other kind of game,—indeed I have, ah!"

"Sis is rale fond o' bar meat," said Asa seriously. "So's pa 'n ma, an' thar's a great big bar in the neighborhood what's been a eatin' of all the chickens 'n turkeys, so 't I heerd ma say that she'd make Sis marry the first feller what killed that bar, an' 'f no 'n could be found with spunk 'nough to tackle it, she'd hev to live an old maid. I d'n know what makes ma so determined 'bout that bar, but she says she's goin' t' git rid o' it some way."

Mr. Sammy Flaxseed found his heart rising with fear and happiness. Sammy was a coward and had a mortal dread of bears and all sorts of dangerous wild beasts. He could take a shot-

gun and shoot the poor little quails or innocent birds for weeks at a time, but when it came to firing at a dangerous wild beast, which, unless he gave it a mortal wound at first shot, would turn on him and rend him to pieces, was quite another thing.

The recollection, however, that he would make himself a hero by destroying this ravenous wild beast, and almost insure the hand of the belle of Blue Grass Valley, determined him to make the effort.

"Boy," he said, laying his hand on Asa's shoulder, "do you know where that ba' can be found?"

"Yes; ye bet I do," said Asa solemnly.

"Can you take me to it?"

"Oh, yes; but ye wouldn't go would you?"

"Wouldn't I. Oh, just give me a true uneerring rifle, and put me on its trail, and they'll either haul me home in a wagon or the ba'."

"Well, pa's got a splendid gun, sure fire, never misses and sends lead right through. Now I'll git it fur ye. Don't say nuthin' 'bout it, cos ef pa thought ye war goin' out on sich a dangerous trip he'd not let ye hev it. I'll go'n git it right now, meet me down by the big tree."

Mr. Flaxseed had been waiting but a short time when Asa, who seemed wholly recovered from his lameness, appeared with rifle, bullet pouch, belt and long hunting-knife.

"Ye'll need the knife 'f ye git to close quarters with the bar; cos ye see he fights like sixty, 'n the way he digs into ye's some. Ye've got to dig back lively, or the bar'll git away with ye."

Mr. Flaxseed was already trembling with dread apprehension, but he had screwed his courage up to the sticking point, and resolved to do so or die. He shouldered the gun, buckled the belt about his waist, and told Asa to lead the way; very much as a man might start out to lead a forlorn hope.

The boy took the lead along a dark wooded path, which wound about among hills, and breaks, and rocks, and knolls. There were waterfalls, brooks and mossy banks, and delightful glens which looked as if they might be the homes of fairies. The active mind of Sammy Flaxseed half expected to see elfin spirites dancing on the green. The day was exceedingly warm, and the deep recesses of that dark old wood were cool and refreshing.

They wandered over a rocky part of country, passed through a thicket of brambles and crossed a fence. Here was another thorn patch through which they crawled, tearing their clothes and scratching the skin of the dandy from Lexington. When they had got through the thicket they were in a thick wood; so thick they scarcely could see any distance. Here Asa halted, refusing to advance another step.

“Go on an’ ye’ll find the bar,” he said. “Ye’ve got the gun, ’n ye kin kill it at fust sight if ye hold ’er right. I shant go another step. Draw yer knife soon ’s ye shoot ’im, an run up and pitch in, fur its too late then to climb a tree.”

With this consolation and encouragement, the Lexington dandy crept up the slight ascent, trembling in every limb. His eyes were widely distended, his heart was thumping like a base drum, and he was quaking with dread. He started at every sound, and glared at every object.

Soon, through the leaves, his eyes caught sight of a large dark brown object. It was old bruin. Oh, how his knees knocked together and he trembled with fear. He shook from head to foot. Sammy realized that he was facing death, but it was now too late to retreat. He fell down upon his knees and tried to pray, but “Now I lay me down to sleep” was all the prayer he could call to mind at that moment. With maddened desperation he seized the gun, leveled it at the monster, and fired.

There was a crash following the report, and the animal lay struggling and kicking in the agonies of death. Now was the time ; and dropping his gun he snatched his knife and, closing his eyes, ran forward and cut the dying monster’s throat. Falling upon his knees he raised his hands and eyes upward in thanks for his deliverance. Sounds of footsteps recalled him to his senses, and looking

up he saw a tall, lank Kentuckian, with a dark look on his brow, approaching. In a voice of thunder he yelled :

“ See here, stranger, I want you to pay me fur that 'ar calf !”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIVALS.

SAMMY FLAXSEED rose in horror and astonishment from his knees. He gazed down at the poor sickly calf which lay torn with the shot and mangled with his knife before him, and wondered how it had been so suddenly transformed from a bear to a calf. But the transformation was complete.

He began to stammer out an apology.

“ You need n't apologize ; pay me fur that ar calf, or I'll choke the life right out o' ye.”

“ B-b-b-but, sir—it was—a ba'.”

“ Bar ; can't ye tell a bar frum a calf ?” cried the excitable Mr. Dallyripple.” “ I'll tell ye ye've jist got ter pay me fur that'r calf, right now.”

“ I-I had no idea it was yo' calf.”

“ Thunder, ye did'nt. Whose calf 'd ye think it was ?”

“ I thought it was a ba'.”

“ Oh, bar ; what lunatic asylum 'd you git out of that ye can't tell a calf frum a bar ? Come

shell 'er right out, 'n less hev no more words bout it, or I'll wear the earth out with ye," roared Mr. Dallyripple.

From a distant crab thicket, convulsed with laughter, and hardly able to restrain his screams, Aas Mullen watched Sis' beau as he put his hand in his pocket and drew out his slender purse.

"How much is the calf worth?" he asked in a voice almost choking.

"Ten dolla's."

The Lexington dude started back in astonishment, as well he might, for that was certainly twice as much as the calf was worth. He began to remonstrate, for like most dudes our Lexington friend had not a great amount of money to spare.

"Pay it," yelled the excited Kentuckian of the Blue Grass Valley, waving his fists in the air, and at times approaching exceedingly near the nose of the dandy. "Pay it ye scoundrel, or I'll take it out 'n yer hide."

"Oh-h-h-h here it is," stammered the unfortunate dude, counting out the money.

"Now take the calf."

"I don't want it."

"Ye shall. Ye bought it, an' I aint goin' to hev the thing laying roun' here in the way."

In vain the Lexington gent persisted that he did not want the calf, he was forced to throw it on his shoulder and carry it out of the pasture anyway.

Asa hastened home to tell his sister, who was his confidant in all things.

"Oh, Asa," she cried, "why did you do such a thing?"

"Oh, Sis, ye'd a dide 'f ye'd a seen him when he shouldered that poor scrawny calf 't he'd thought a bar," and Asa rolled over on the floor and kicked his heels in the air.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Flaxseed returned from his hunt. His clothes were torn and soiled, and he was dirty and had a woebegone look on his face, which moved the sympathetic heart of Sis to pity. She always had words of condolence for those who suffered, and she expressed her sympathy so plainly that Sammy Flaxseed felt a little repayed for all he had been made to suffer.

"Wha' in the world have you been?" asked Mr. Mullen when he saw his daughter's beau come in with a gun on his sholder.

"I have been ba' hunting," the dude answered in a melancholy sort of a way.

"A bar huntin', why land sakes alive man, thar aint a bar 'n a hundred miles o' here."

"Well, your boy said there was—"

"Yes, I knowed it," interrupted the irate father. "That's allers the way. That boy 'll be hung yet. It's no use to larrup him, fur I've worn out I don't know how many straps on his back, but all seems to do no good."

He went in search of Asa again, but that individual was conspicuous for his absence at that moment, and uncle Abram had cooled down toward his dear little boy before he saw him again.

Asa then began to make his peace with Mr. Flaxseed. Perhaps Sammy thought that a nice present brought from Lexington would secure him from the further pranks of this desperate youth. He was willing to make friends with Asa, and Asa was so fair in his promises to mend his ways toward Flaxseed, and so bitterly opposed to Billy Smalltrash, that he soon won Sammy's confidence.

"That feller frum Lexington who was here last got lost in the woods tryin' to catch snipes," said Asa, and he related the whole incident for the edification of Mr. Flaxseed.

"Aw—does he come heah often?" Sammy asked with some anxiety.

"Yes, he does; and I'll tell ye he's a shyin' round Sis a right smart, but I'll bet ye kin cut him out."

"How?"

"Jest pitch in. That's the way I'd do, 'n if that other feller come foolin' roun' too much, slap'm over."

"But, now, Asa, my deah boy, aw! you know that is not genteel," said the dude.

"Genteel, nuthin'; what do you keer whether things genteel 'r not down here 'n Blue Grass

Valley. I tell ye that's the way t' win Sis. I know her. She's a fractious gall, 'n all yer fine flimmadidle doin's don't amount to half as much as one good square knock 'em down with the fist."

This made poor Sammy Flaxseed wish that he was a Heenan, Tom Allen or Sullivan; but, unfortunately, he was not a pugilist. He grew a little combative, however, and in a voice which indicated a dawning determination, he asked :

"When will that villain from Lexington dare to presume to come heah again?"

Asa's face brightened, for he at once saw that his plan was working. The fish was beginning to bite.

"Why, he's comin' back next Saturday," said Asa solemnly, "an' if I was you I'd be on hand like a thousand o' brick. I tell ye if ye git to be my brother-in-law, ye've jest got ter hustle, that's all thar is of it."

The upshot of this conversation was that Mr. Flaxseed decided to hustle, and if he could possibly induce Miss Clara to allow him the privilege, he would return next Saturday.

"Don't say a word to her 'bout it, greeney," interrupted Asa as soon as he discovered what the intent of Mr. Flaxseed was.

"Why?"

"Cos she'll shet down on it. She's got one beau for next Saturday, and though Sis is a

right handy gall 'n talkin' to fellers, one beau at a time is all she kin attend to. Come any way, come by mistake or accident, an' then pologize fur doin' 't, but go in and make the most ye kin out'n it."

Mr. Flaxseed decided to follow his advice, and come life or death, he would pulverize, annihilate, and humiliate Billy Smalltrash on the following Saturday.

Some time during the week Asa found his sister in a good humor,—really Sis was always in a good humor, but at this time she was in a suitable frame of mind to enjoy any plan that promised fun. They were alone, and he said :

"Sis, d'ye keer any thing fur them Lexington dudes."

"No," she answered, laughing and blushing.

"Why don't ye git red o' 'em?"

"Get rid of them, Asa?" said Sis, laughing and blushing. "That is much easier said than done. I wish I was rid of them and would never see them again ; but then one can't help pitying the poor fellows, they are rather good-hearted, shallow-brained fellows, though they mean no harm by it."

"Well, Sis, 'f ye'll jine in 'n help me I'll clear out these rascals fur ye in no time."

"But you must not play any tricks on them."

"Oh, tricks, nuthin'. That's jest like you allers are. Yer allers 'fraid o' some body playin'

tricks on some 'un. Guess I aint goin' to kill anybody, am I?"

"No; but then it is too bad the way you do sometimes."

"I aint killed anybody."

"No; but you have humiliated people so many times that it is just terrible the way you act."

"Pshaw—everybody lives over it, an' then don't people laugh 'bout it, least all but me—and when pa jest wallops me till I kin see stars it's no fun."

"Why do you do things for which pa will have to whip you."

"Pa don't hev to whale me. He could live an' keep in jest as good health lettin' me alone as to be allers a bouncin' on a feller, floggin' the life amost out o' him."

"But you are so bad, Asa; why can't you be good?"

"I'm good."

"For what?"

"To keep people frum havin' the blues, an' to interest yer beaux all the time. They never git lonesome when I'm about."

"I don't think they rejoice very much at your presence—" Sis began.

"Aw, shucks, Sis, that's not business. Come let's talk on business an' quit sich nonsense."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"'Bout them beaux."

"What of them?"

Asa crossed his legs, and assumed a very business-like manner, as he answered:

"Ef I didn't very much misunderstand ye, Sis, ye indirectly expressed a wish to be rid of 'em."

"Well, I would be glad to be rid of them, that is a fact," assented Sis.

"Wall now, don't ye know ye kin jest as well as not?"

"Tell me how."

"Jest help me a little ye know."

"Help you to some trick—never."

"No, I don't want ye to help 'n some trick. I jist want ye to be on hand so's to see some-thin'; they'll set up a job on each other."

"What do you mean, Asa?" the beautiful girl asked while her form was convulsed with laughter, for she knew that Asa had some plan on foot which promised an abundance of sport.

Asa then informed her that Sammy Flaxseed and Billy Smalltrash would both be at the Mullen homestead. She was astonished at this information, but interested in the plan which Asa began to unfold. At the conclusion of his explanation she was almost speechless with laughter. But it is not always best to laugh too much at an event which is still prospective. The plan may miscarry, and laughing in advance

lessens the mirth when the event actually does transpire.

The Saturday following brought Sammy Flaxseed. He came quite early by another route from that which Billy Smalltrash would come. Billy was perfectly thunderstruck and in no very good humor when he discovered that his rival had preceded him.

"Ah! Mr. Flaxseed, why did you come?" he asked with lowering brow.

"That is a question, ah! which it is impertinence to ask, and which I do not propose to answer, ah!"

"You don't, ah?"

"No, I don't, ah."

"Then, sir, I may find a way to make you?" said the infuriated Mr. Smalltrash, glaring at him furiously through his glasses.

"Ah, sirrah, what mean ye?" snarled Mr. Flaxseed.

"Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen," said Miss Clara, coming forward to prevent any open rupture. "Remember, gentleman, where you are and what you are about to do."

"Oh, I beg pawdon, Miss Clara," said Mr. Smalltrash, bowing quite low.

"I beg pawdon, Miss Clara," said Mr. Flaxseed, bowing still lower.

"It was only because I was provoked by this awdacious puppy," said Smalltrash.



“ ‘Oh, gentlemen, remember where you are, and what you are about to do,’ said Miss Clara.”—Page 132.

"It was because that sheep-head was in my way."

"Come, Miss Mullen, allow me to conduct you from the presence of such a bo' as he is," said Mr. Smalltrash.

"Beg pawdon, Miss Mullen, allow me to accompany you—he is not fit to associate with you."

Then the dudes glared at each other and growled, and Clara laughed until the tears almost started down her cheeks.

"What are you doing here?" yelled Smalltrash, menacing Flaxseed.

"What are you doing here?" cried Flaxseed.

"None of your business."

"None of your business."

"You rascal, I'll make it my business."

"You've just run over me, Sam Flaxseed, as long as you can. I had Miss Clara's company engaged, and you ar' an intrudah."

"What are you going to do about it, Bill Smalltrash. Go back to Lexington and pay yo' bowd bill befo' you da' come to see Miss Mullen."

"Go pay yo' wash-bill, Sam Flaxseed."

They were about once more to come together, when Miss Clara proved again to be oil upon troubled waters. She reminded them that they were in her presence, and promised to give her attention impartially to each of them if they would shake hands and promise to be friends.

They did so, though they glared at her like tigers.

Asa says : You'd a dide if you'd a seen them walking one on each side of Sis, both claiming her attention and both talking to her all the while. Every few moments they glared at each other in rage, which was ill-suppressed.

"Things'r workin' all right," said Asa as he saw the rivals in company with Sis, and anything else than brotherly love between them. "Now I'll git 'em apart, an' I'll suggest a plan o' settlin' this."

Asa hurried away after eating his dinner to see his chum Tom Thrasher, and complete the arrangements for the coming sport, for Asa intended to have some fun with Sis' beaux.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUEL.

"Tom," said Asa, panting with his run. He found Tom at the front gate for he had seen Asa coming from afar off, and naturally supposing there was some business of importance on hand, he hastened to meet him.

"What is it, Asa?" he asked.

"Wait—" he panted—"till a feller kin git his breath," and Asa took a few seconds for breath.

ing, and then said: "We've jest got the finest chance fur a big lot o' fun o' anyone ye ever seed 'n yer life."

"What is it?"

"Two dewds t' our house,—both Sis's beaux. Mad as wet hens 't each other—an' they kin jest make lots o' fun fur us."

"How?"

"Got them ole pistols o' yer pa's?"

"Yes."

"Both shute?"

"Yer bet."

"Kin yer git powder 'n caps?"

"Course I kin, an' anything else, ef ye want ter go a huntin' with them pistols."

"Oh, go huntin' nuthin'," said Asa. "Taint no time ter go huntin' now. D'ye git them pistols so the'll both shute paper wads, 'n we'll hev fun in the mornin'."

"Why, that's Sunday; can't shute on Sunday."

Asa revealed his plan more fully and Tom Thrasher acquiesced in it. Then they sat down and talked it all over, and Asa rose and went home to complete things there.

Sis had got her lovers somewhat mollified, and left the dudes sitting in the best-room while she excused herself to attend to some domestic affairs which required her attention. They only pretended to be in a good humor, and sat glaring at each other for sometime in hate and amazement.

At last Billy Smalltrash, who thought himself the most abused of mortals, rose and went out into the yard. He walked down the path until he came to the gate, on which he leaned his elbow, striving to think of some plan whereby he could utterly annihilate his enemy.

"It's got to come, said Smalltrash savagely. "Either he or I shall die. We can't both live 'n this world. There's too many of us here. How will I do it?"

At this moment he discovered Asa coming up the road.

"Hello, Mr. Smalltrash ; out gittin' cool?"

"Yes, Asa. What is that fellow doing here?" he asked.

"I dun know," Asa answered. "He's here most of the time now. He was here last Saturday," and then Asa went on to relate how he killed a calf supposing it was a bear.

"What am I to do with such a persistent fellah."

"Lick 'im."

"Fight him, ah?"

"Yes."

"But I could not, he might be stronger than I."

Asa seemed to be for a moment lost in thought, as if he was trying to fall upon some profitable plan. At last he said :

"I'll tell ye how to get rid o' him, Mr. Smalltrash."

"How?" Billy asked eagerly, for somehow he had confidence in Asa Mullen's judgment and discretion.

"Call him out."

"What's that?"

"Challenge 'im."

"To fight a duel?"

"Yes."

"Oh, sah, I've no objection to fighting him with pistols, but then yo' know it's against the law."

"Law nuthin'. Down here in Blue Grass Valley, they allers settle things one o' two ways."

Billy Smalltrash was really trembling with dread, when he asked what those ways were.

"Either by fightin' with fists or pistols."

"Aw!"

He shuddered convulsively.

"Yes, sir," Asa continued. "Everything like this kind o' a muss must be settled with pistols. He began to fear that Billy Smalltrash would become alarmed and fly from such an unchristian civilized country as was Blue Grass Valley, where love affairs sometimes had such bloody termination, and concluded to make a change. "I say, feller, ye needn't be a bit afraid to challenge him."

"Why?" Billy asked trembling with excitement.

"Cos he won't fight."

"Why won't he?"

"Too big a coward."

"Won't he have to?"

"No, he kin back out; but ye kin bet that Sis won't hev nuthin' more to do with him. Jest back 'im out 'n his cakes dough."

"B-b-b-but suppose he would fight."

"Then kill him. He ain't no shot 'tall. But he won't fight, he knows he's no shot an 'll back out, see 'f he don't. Spunk right up to him an' see 'f he don't back out."

An hour later Asa met Mr. Flaxseed and told him about Mr. Smalltrash going sniping and being left out all night.

"Asa," said Mr. Flaxseed after a few moment's silence, "what am I going to do to get rid of that fellah?"

Asa seemed for a moment to be puzzling his brain for an answer, and then he said:

"I'll tell ye jest what'll do 't."

"What?" was asked by the rival in a fit of desperation.

"He's the biggest coward ye ever saw 'n yer life. Now Sis hates a coward, 'n ye know 'f it comes to the test he'll back right out; challenge him."

"What?"

"Challenge him to fight a duel."

"With what weapons?" and Sammy Flaxseed was trembling with terror.

"Pistols; I kin git 'em fur ye."

"What be shot."

"Oh, shot nuthin'" said Asa, a frown of contempt on his face. "Don't ye know he'll run. Ef ye've got the spunk to stand right up to him an' face 'im like a man, he'll jest back right down. Don't ye be a bit afeard he won't. Jest spunk right up to him if ye ever ixpect to get Sis. She'll go back on ye 'n a minnit ef ye prove a coward. He may seem like he's goin' to hang on at fust, but when he sees the pistols he'll wilt."

By dint of hard persuasion and argument, first with one and then the other, he got their courage screwed up to the sticking-point, and both were ready for each other's gore.

There was only the slightest pretext for a quarrel needed, and by some strange coincidence each of the dudes resolved to challenge the other in the presence of the adored one, that she might witness their courage.

As old uncle Abram Mullen had threatened to drive them both away if they did not evince less anger, they were forced to be sly about shooting each other.

The sun was not over an hour high on that delightful Saturday afternoon when Mr. Flaxseed, who had been holding a private interview with Asa, returned to the large mulberry tree,

beneath which sat the angelic Clara and the hated rival Mr. Smalltrash.

"Are you going sniping to-night? Mr. Smalltrash," he asked with all the venom a disappointed rival can use.

"Are you going on another ba' hunt and kill another calf?" Billy Smalltrash retorted.

"None of your impudence, puppy."

"None of yours, hound."

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Oh, gentlemen—gentlemen," Sis began, but things had gone too far. Billy Smalltrash demanded satisfaction, and Sammy Flaxseed said he should have it, and then they talked of pistols at five paces.

"It's not a fitting place to arrange this in the presence of a lady, but I will arrange the time with you," said Sammy Flaxseed, and he went away tearing a leaf out of his small day-book and writing out a formal challenge, or as near formal as he could, for he had never heard of the code of honor.

The only person he could find suitable to carry the challenge for him was Asa Mullen. It would not do to trust one of the darkies, as they might tell the old folks.

"Now, Asa, my deah boy, aw! don't fail to let yo' angelic sistah know what I've done fo' her sake."

"Oh, Sis 'll know all 'bout it," said Asa. He found the other rival just writing out a challenge. To say that he accepted it at once would be a mild way of putting it. He looked savage enough at the time, and was disappointed because he had not been able to send the challenge himself.

"How does he seem, my deah boy, ah?" he asked.

"He's weakenin'," Asa assured him, "an' ef ye've got the spunk t' stand up 't him he'll back out."

This was consolation to Smalltrash.

When he went back with the acceptance to the other dude, he asked:

"How does he seem, my dear boy, ah?"

"He's weakenin'," Asa answered, with a strong, assuring smile. "Ef ye've got the spunk t' stan' right up t' him, he'll back out yit."

And this was consolation to Flaxseed.

Each lived on the hope that when the test came the other would back out. Asa kept his word with Sis, and told her all about it. The time for the duel was to be the next morning at sunrise. It seemed a terrible thing to fix upon such a beautiful morning for murdering each other, but that was the time fixed, and Asa urged each to stand up to the rack whether there was any fodder there or not. They so decided, fodder or no fodder.

The dudes from Lexington passed the night in adjoining rooms, restlessly tossing upon their beds and sighing. Asa passed the time in listening first at one door and then at the other.

"Oh, will I be alive to-morrow night?" he heard Billy Smalltrash sigh.

"Will I have entered the dark portals of death when the morrows sun sets?" he next heard Sammy Flaxseed sob.

Of course neither slept. Who could sleep with such a burden on his mind. Each expected to be a corpse. Billy Smalltrash at last thought he would leap from the window and go back to Lexington, but when he stuck his head out he saw Sammy Flaxseed with his head out, and he was thinking about flying the country, and Smalltrash thought Flaxseed had weakened, and Flaxseed thought Smalltrash had weakened, so both went back to their bed of agony, doubt, darkness, and despair.

Thus the night wore away.

Day began to dawn, and Asa, who was always an early riser when he had business on hand, went down the road to meet Tommy Thrasher. He knew Tommy was coming, but wanted to see that everything was in order. He and Tommy had a talk; then Asa went back and woke Sis and put some mischief in her head. He found the dudes half dead with fear, each drawing the coverlets over his head, and he had no little proding

of their pride to do, before he could rouse them. But they got up and dressed at last.

It was a glorious Sabbath morning. The air was still, and the chirrupings of birds, just awaking from a night of sweet innocent sleep, filled the air with music. It was not very cold, and yet both the dudes were shivering and trembling in a strange, unaccountable manner.

The sun was not yet up, but the eastern sky was growing redder every moment with a glorious halo. There was so much now worth while living for that neither of the unfortunate Lexington dudes wanted to die.

They saw only Asa and another boy larger than he was. The other boy carried a bundle of something in his hand which made them shudder. Silently and solemnly the little procession moved out into the road, then to the woods. Oh, how Smalltrash wished Flaxseed would weaken; and oh, how Flaxseed wished Smalltrash would weaken. But a delightful little green valley between two adjacent hills was reached, and the boys talked in solemn whispers. The dudes were both cold from toes to head. The boys placed them at five paces, and gave each a pistol, which to our unfortunate Lexington friends seemed large as a cannon.

“Now, when ye hear me yell ‘fire,’ shute,” said Asa.

They heard him, but each was silently murmuring a prayer and preparing for death.

"Git ready," cried Asa, and they did, if shutting their eyes was getting ready. Asa stood by one and Tom Thrasher by the other. "*Aim;*" the pistols were raised and held by unsteady hands. "*Fire.*" Two sharp reports rang out on the air, each dude felt a stinging blow in the face, and went down.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"OH!—oh! I'm killed," groaned Smalltrash.

"Oh, Lawd, I'm dead, 'n I know it," sobbed Flaxseed.

Asa Mullen bent over him, and he certainly was a sight to behold. His face was not covered with his life-blood, but the contents of an over-ripe egg, which had evidently not been discharged from the pistol but the hand of our hero's chum Tom Thrasher, while Smalltrash suffered from a similar wound from the hand of Asa himself.

"How's yours, Tom?" Asa asked, feeling Flaxseed's pulse.

"Head shot all to pieces."

"So's mine."

"Warnt they good shots though; brains runnin' down in their faces."

"Oh, Lawd, forgive me!" groaned Flaxseed.

"Oh, good Lawd, have mercy on me a sinnah!" moaned Smalltrash.

"That's right," said Asa, who had a remarkable power over his risibles when he saw fit to keep them under his control. He was at this minute gravity itself. "Ye've neither one got many minutes more to live, an' ef ye've got any confessions t' make, better make 'em."

"Oh, dear!"

"Oh, deah!"

"No one kin live long with their brains out."

"Oh, Lawd, forgive me for taking money from my employer's till!" groaned Smalltrash.

"Oh, Lawd, forgive me for not giving that pocketbook and money back to the lady who lost it, and foh stealing money from the chief clerk. I'm going to die now, forgive me!" wailed Flaxseed.

"That's right, 'fess up," said Asa, with a face which was very grave. "You aint got very much time to spare 'bout this, cos I tell ye, yer times mighty short.

"Oh! oh! oh! I'll never pick another pocket, good Lawd!" groaned Sammy Flaxseed. "If you'll only let me live, I'll be good."

"I'll never rob another till, good Lawd!" howled the dying Billy Smalltrash. "If you'll spare me, I'll go to preaching."

"I'll turn preacher, too," wailed Sammy Flax-

seed, who really believed his last moment had come.

"Then git up an' go to preachin'," said Asa with a laugh. "Wipe that egg out o' yer eyes 'n ye kin see what yer bout. Git up ye darn fools, yer not hurt 'tall."

Both the dudes began to realize that they had been badly sold. They struggled to their feet and began to wipe their faces. Oh! what a smell. Did ever anyone find anything more offensive to the olfactory organs than eggs in the last stage of consumption? Our dudes certainly thought not as they rubbed their faces again and again, to free them from the offensive odor.

"Ef I'd a knowed that 'd been the kind of ammunition you fellers war a shootin', I'd a not been a standin' so close round to ye," Asa remarked with a chuckle.

Tom Thrasher now fairly burst all bounds and rolled over upon the grass, laughed and roared until the woods fairly echoed with his shouts.

Perhaps our Lexington friends could have stood all this had not the rippling peals of musical laughter come from another direction, and just behind a large oak tree they caught the form of Miss Clara convulsed with laughter. This was more than human nature could endure, and both our Lexington dudes felt themselves sinking. They wished they were at home.

"I'll see this thing out yet," cried Sammy Flax-

seed, wheeling about and disappearing in the thicket.

"Yes, I will see the end of this," roared Small-trash, and he disappeared doubtless to search for that end of which he was speaking. Strange to say neither halted until he brought up in a Lexington street car, where they sat and glared at each other from opposite sides. The other passengers in the car thought there must be some Limburger cheese aboard.

It was a dull day at the Mullen homestead. According to Asa's own term he had spent all of his ammunition, and he would be compelled to recuperate and gather in some more material before he went any further.

"Guess, Sis, we put it in too strong on them beaux o' yourn. I'm afeered we jist skeered 'em right out, so 't they won't come back soon agin."

"It's too bad, Asa, the way you did."

"I didn't do nuthin'. The blasted fools jist skeered each other purty near to death. I didn't hurt 'em 'tall; guess may be they'll hev more sense arter this."

Sis could not help but laugh when she remembered the ridiculous figure they cut as they lay panting upon the green sward under the delusion that their brains had been shot out.

"It was too funny, I do declare," she said. "I never yet saw anything so ridiculous."

“An’ both o’ them said they’d been a stealin’,” put in Asa, with a chuckle. “Oh, I tell ye, when a rascal thinks grim death’s got a hold on him, it’s mighty apt to make ’em ’fess up purty quick.”

There was no preaching that Sunday in the Blue Grass Valley school-house, so Asa’s parents remained at home.

Mr. Mullen was a little mystified at first over the sudden disappearance of his guests, until Asa explained that they had received a summons early that morning to go to Lexington, and had gone before the father was up. This so completely explained matters that it was needless to worry his mind further.

Asa pined for some work to engage his ambitious mind, but his parents with puritanic accuracy observed the Sabbath.

The day passed drearily enough. Late in the afternoon he did manage to steal away and ride a wild steer at break-neck speed through the woods; then, though Autumn had turned the leaves and chilled the waters, he went swimming, and came out in time to tie a tin can to Mr. Dallyripple’s dog and send him home yelping as if he was being killed, to frighten Deacon Snow’s horse and make him almost upset his rider. Then he went over to Tom Thrasher’s to find out what day of the week it was, and fall upon some plan to keep out of school that winter.

While with Tom, they managed several little schemes for the amusement of the people. They tied grass, hunted up a hornet's nest and put it in close proximity to a public road, and prepared it to shake down on anyone who might pass that way. They tied a cat to the tail of Dallyripple's old gray mare, and left her to go home as rapidly as she could. They felled a tree across the road, and adjourned to meet at the first call for mischief.

There was a house in the neighborhood that was reputed to be haunted. It was on the Valley road, about half-a-mile from the Mullen homestead. The road led to McFarlin's mill, down on Blue Lick, and it was a lonesome road. It seemed that trees grew taller and larger along this road than on any other in the whole country. There were many dark shadows within those woods calculated to inspire awe and fear in any one.

Then the old haunted-house stood back from the road a considerable distance, and had a decidedly dismal appearance. There was a great, tall, beech-tree near it, beneath which it seemed that goblins might congregate by moonlight and made the night hideous. There were rumors also of groans being heard about the house, and sheeted ghosts in matchless dignity gliding by in air. Some one had seen a white figure with slashed throat, and heard shrieks of



"He came out in time to frighten Deacon Snow's horse and unseat the rider."—Page 149,

murder. Shooting stars, and strange meteors had been seen in the sky, and strange creatures flying through the midnight air ; so that no one really cared to go near the house at midnight. In fact, no one, save old man Dallyripple, who was skeptical about every thing, cared to go near the house, even by day-light. He, in defiance of all ghosts in ghostdom, had ploughed up the ground, and sowed a turnip patch close to the haunted-house.

Asa's pa and Tobe, the darky, went to mill, and Asa knew they would be late returning. Their road led by the haunted-house. Mr. Mullen declared that there was no such a thing in the world as "ha'nts." Neither scripture nor science proved that there were such things, and he was very skeptical as to their existence.

"Tom," said Asa, "'spose we go to Dallyripple's turnip patch to-night for turnips to eat."

"Steal 'em?" asked Tom.

"Naw,—steal nuthin'," cried Asa indignantly. "D'ye take me fur a thief? Mr. Dallyripple told me I might hev all the turnips I could eat, ef I'd go thar'n pull'em after sundown, 'n eat 'em in the old house."

"Aint ye afraid o' ha'nts, Asa?"

"Naw—are you?"

Tom shook his head as to indicate his skepticism as to ghosts of all kinds. He was willing to go if Asa was, and Asa was always willing to

do anything which promised either fun or adventure.

"When'll ye go, Tom?" he asked.

"When d'ye want to go."

"This evening."

"All right, count me in."

The arrangements were perfected, and just a bit before sundown, Asa and Tom, both on pretext of hunting for their cows, set out to the house that was reputed to be haunted.

They had a point of meeting. Boys usually arrange those matters with as much exactness as business men, and are far more prompt in making their business engagements. Asa was at the rendezvous but a few moments when he saw Tom coming on a run.

Both boys had put on shoes, for Autumn was advancing and the evenings were growing colder. There had been several slight frosts, and several times skims of ice, not thicker than a window glass, had been seen over the water.

They had no thought of driving up the cows just then. Cows could be attended to after they had visited the haunted-house.

They reached the turnip patch just after dusk, and were not long in selecting each a juicy vegetable, and then Asa said:

"Naw, Tom, ye know we must go inter the house an' eat 'em."

"Less go up stairs," suggested Tom,

"'Greed."

There was a stairway leading up outside of the building, with a landing at the top, and a door opening into the upper story. The boys ran up the creaky, rickety old steps like a pair of wild goats scampering over a rocky hillside. When they got up to the top they pushed open the door without ceremony, and drawing their pocket-knives began peeling turnips without any regard for the dignity of the "ha'nts" that might inhabit this portion of the country.

"Naw, 'f thars any ha'nts let 'm come on," said Asa, defiantly crunching his turnip.

"What's that?" said Tom, suddenly feeling a little timidity.

"'Taint nuthin'."

"Yes, 'tis—I hear somethin'."

"What does it sound like."

"Wagin."

"'Tis a wagin comin' down the road," said Asa, his mischievous blue eyes evincing no little excitement. "Oh, I know who 'tis."

"Who?"

"It's pa 'n Tobe comin' back frum the mill. Less jest begin to whoop 'em up an' make 'em think all the ha'nts in the Blue Grass Valley's broke loose, 'n skeer 'em nigh into fits."

"I'll do it."

"Oh, we'll hev fun."

Asa went to the door and looked down the

road. It had already grown so dark that objects could not be seen at any great distance.

"Now, Tom, begin to whoop 'em up. Groan."

Tom gave vent to a terrible groan, which Asa followed with a half-smothered scream. There followed a scuffling sound, which increased every few moments.

"Keep it up, keep it up," whispered Asa, as the wagon drew nearer and nearer to them. They did "whoop 'em up," if jumping and groaning, and scuffling could be called "whooping 'em up."

The wagon came opposite the house, and Mr. Mullen called a halt.

"Tobe, what in the name o' the Lawd is that?" the good old man asked in astonishment, not a little mixed with fear.

"I-I-I-I dun no m-m-master, but I kinder s-s-spects its ha'nts."

"Tobe, you silly feller, there are no sich things in existence as ha'nts," said Mr. Mullen.

The groans and racket in the upper story of the haunted-house continued. The plastering on the low ceiling was loose and began falling down upon the floor, with a glassy like sound.

"Oh, m-master, good Lawdy, good Lawdy, what'll I do—what'll I do?" the darkey groaned.

"Stay right here, Tobe, an' I'll go in the name o' the good Lawd an' see what it is. I will tho' I should see something that'd turn me to stone."

"Oh, marster—g-g-good marster, don't," groaned the frightened darkey, who expected every moment to see some form of horrid kind appear from one of those dark windows.

"B-b-be quiet, Tobe—don't go to getting frightened, now, an' go off an' leave me."

"N-n-no, m-m-master, I'se not skeered. I'se gwine to stay right here wid ye till ye c-c-come back."

Asa and Tom Thrasher were still continuing their ghostly racket when the sound of footsteps were heard at the bottom of the stair-way.

"By ginger, pa's comin' up the stairs," Asa whispered. "He'll jest whale us. He'll give us goss."

"What'll we do?" Tom Thrasher asked, far worse scared than he would have been at a whole legion of ghosts.

Asa glanced above and saw a small square hole in the ceiling, which was the only entrance to the attic. "We must git up thar, right pert too, for pa's comin'."

"How?"

"The ceilin's low. Lem me git on yer shoulders an' I'll go 't 'n then I'll pull you up."

The plan was put in execution at once, and as both boys were active as circus tumblers, they bid fair to be hidden away. At every move, however, new chunks of plaster broke loose and fell upon the floor, ringing like broken glass.

Asa was safely housed in the attic and reached his hands down to pull his friend up out of danger. All the while the firm footsteps of the stern old man could be heard coming up the creaky, rickety old stairway. It was quite dark in the house, or one could have seen Tom's legs dangling in the air as Asa tugged away and tried to pull him up into the attic. But Tom was a heavy boy and taxed his friend's strength. Plaster still continued to fall in a shower upon the floor. At last Asa's hold slipped and Tom fell with a crash on the floor, bringing down a barrel of plaster with him. Mr. Mullen could stand this no longer and wheeled to run.

He lost his balance and fell rolling down the stairway.

Asa nearly died as he heard his pa roll from the top to the bottom of the stairway, crying :

"Oh, Lawdy ! oh, Lawdy ! oh, Lawdy !" at almost every jump. The team took fright and run away, wrecking the wagon and throwing Tobe out. If the darkey had not fallen on his head, it was supposed he would have been killed.

When Asa got home with the cows, late that night, he found his pa badly bruised, with a sprained arm, sitting in a chair, while his ma was busy binding up his hurts. The good man was telling his good wife about passing the haunted-house, and "hearin' strange voices up thar I

then got out o' the wagon 'n went up the steps outside o' the house, 'n thar kept fallin' glass on the flo' all the time, an' them voices an' the awful-est groans ye ever heerd kept up. I declar', Susan, I'll never say agin that I don't believe in ghosts. What war they?"

"Rats," said Aunt Susan.

"Rats! oh, gammon, d'ye think rats kin groan an' gallop 'bout like a herd o' cattle. Then jest as I got to the top a hoss fell whack on the flo', an' fifty bar'l o' glass with 'im."

Asa was attacked with a choking spell, and left the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOE-DOWN IN WILD CAT HOLLER.

"Hi, yee; whoop 'em up; Swing yer pardner: First lady lead to the right; Gents foller suit; Lady in the centre an' three hands 'round; Ev'rybody dance; Allaman left. Tee-tee-di-dee di-dee. Right hand to pardner and grand right'n left. He, ye, whoop 'em up."

"Te-ree-diddle-dee, diddle diddle dee—" It was a squeaky old fiddle in the hands of a "blind nigger" that made the music, to which the wild dancers kept a sort of time. They were having a grand hoe-down in Jack's cabin, down in "Wild Cat Holler." The cabin was a small log affair,

but when the table, beds and chairs were shoved out of the way it afforded plenty of room for a good, old-fashioned hoe-down. They were having it lively to-night, and the tramp of many feet over the puncheon floor rang out like the tramp of cavalry. Some had evidently embibed freely from the hidden bottles. The fiddler sat on a table and sawed away. The dancers danced furiously. The door was ajar, letting the rays of the moon fall within the apartment.

This was a kind of a "holiday blow out," Jack White said. Jack's cabin was in the isolated Wild Cat's Holler, at the lower end, and his neighbors came from the hills and gullies. Most of them were squatters and wood-cutters. The girls were red-cheeked, freckle-faced, and would average one hundred and forty in avordupois. They worked during the week at spinning-wheels, looms, or in cotton patches, and never missed a "dance," when there was one in the neighborhood.

Jack White was a general favorite. At a hoe-down, corn-husking, or log-rolling, he was the chief man. He was fearless in a knock-down, and never failed to take the shine out of a feller, if he began to put on airs.

It would have been a sorry day for one of Sis' dude beaux, had he ventured into Jack's domain. He would "jest as lief knock a feller down for wearin' a biled shirt, as take a drink of whiskey,"

some of his friends declared. It would never do for any one to go to putting on airs around Jack White. Jack wouldn't stand it, and there would be no foolin' with him."

Jack's cabin was located at the lower edge of the "Holler," and several miles from Mr. Mullen's house, and how Asa came to be there would puzzle the oldest man living. It was no puzzle to Asa, however, for like everything else he did, he had an explanation for his visit here. He had started out to hunt the cows, and got lost, and wandered on, and on, until he came right slap into Jack's house, and now, as he was here, he thought he would stay until the "hoe-down" was over, and have some one show him to the road which led home. True the road was not very far away, and a very plain road, and easily found, but Asa had not lost it, and it was not his business to hunt it up. Let those people who knew just where it was take him to it when they got at leisure, which they certainly would not be until this dance was over.

Having found himself in this out of the way cabin in "Wild Cat Holler," Asa determined, like a philosopher, to make the best he could out of the situation. He climbed up on the greasy pine-board table, by the side of the blind musician, and sometimes ventured to take part in the calling off.

"Whoop 'em up—whoop 'em up," he occasion-

ally yelled, as the dancers became warmed up, and to use old Jack's words "they jest hoed it down."

"Bet that fat gal dances Jim Robbins to death 'fore mornin'," Asa yelled.

"Shet yer mouth ye red-headed pecker wood," shouted a two-hundred-pounder, who, in "swinging her pardner," actually lifted his feet from the floor.

We have accounted for Asa's presence at the hoe-down,—it may not be a very satisfactory account to the reader who may doubt Asa's story about having lost his way, but then it's the best excuse we can offer.

There is another there, however, whose presence we will have to explain. Now reader prepare for a genuine, first-class surprise. You need not hold your breath until you suffocate, but get ready for an astonishment.

The other was the Rev. Jordan Caldwell, the Methodist minister.

There now, you have denounced him as a hypocrite, hav'nt you? But hold on a moment; don't be too hasty with Mr. Caldwell. He is not a bad man, but somehow has a remarkable faculty for blundering into awkward scrapes.

He was traveling in this country to his appointment and, not being familiar with the roads, got lost, and was forced to put up at old Jack's house. Mr. Caldwell was only a minister journeying in

a missionary sort of a way through the world, trying honestly to "pluck brands from the burning," and here was a whole bonfire to be extinguished.

He was wearied with his hard day's ride and had retired, before the festivities began, to the garret, to a bed which had been prepared for him. We don't know how Asa found it out, but he did in some manner learn that the minister was in the attic bed-room. He was delighted to see that Jack was about "three sheets in the wind," and wouldn't stand any foolishness. It was no use for any of those fine-aired fellows to come about Jack. Everybody had to conform to his notion of things, and when he said "whoop 'em up," they had to "whoop 'em up."

Before the minister had fallen asleep the squeaky old fiddle struck up its: "Tee diddle dee, diddle dee, diddle dee,—tre ree; diddle-dee diddle dee."

There was no sleeping for that good man. He was too much shocked, and felt it his duty to go down below and warn these revelers of their peril. It is true that he had some apprehensions as to the result of the warning, but then he resolved come what might he would do his duty.

"If I can but get their ear once, I will hold them," he said as he hurriedly dressed in the dark, and felt his way down stairs. Asa heard him coming, and told Jack that the visitor was coming

either to take a part in the dance himself, or to interfere. That was enough for Jack. He had some suspicions of his guest all along, and he met him at the stair door.

"That's right, stranger," he roared. "Come right down an' shake yer leg; jine in. Be one o' us. Here, Ma, git a pardner fur this guest."

"Sir, I-I-I—" began Mr. Caldwell.

"Hurry up, Ma;" interrupted Jack in a voice like the roar of a bull. "They're makin' up the next set. Drag Mrs. Betts or Liz Johnston in here an' give 'em a knock down to this gent. He's dyin' to crack his heels together in the mazy. Hump yerself, ma."

"They're a dancin' three sets out in the kitchin', an' all the gals is spoke fur," cried out "ma," a great red-faced wild-eyed woman in a yellow dress, with green and blue flounces and pink ribbons, "But I'll take a trot with the stranger myself."

"Madame, I-I—"

"You don't know how? Land o' rest; that don't make a mite o' difference. Any fool kin dance 'Old Dan Tucker.' I'll slap you right through easy as fallin' off a log."

"No, madam," said the minister with all the sternness he possessed, "I have never yet indulged in the practice of dancing, and I never will, and—"

"What's that yer givin' us?" roared Jack, his

face white with rage, while "Ma" stepped back with her fist clenched. "Ye don't dance, he? Not even with 'ma,' a lady be gosh, from way back? A lady which is fit to adorn better serciety 'n what you've ever poked yer nose in, by Jacks; a lady what kin play on the orgin and write poetry be gosh; and you won't dance with her?"

"But, sir, I-I-I—"

"Not a word out o' you; 'ma,' grab 'im."

"Ma" grabbed.

As Mr. Caldwell seemed about to make some feeble resistance Jack took down his old Kentucky rifle from its rack over the door, and yelled:

"Hey, you, fiddler; saw out 'Granny will yer dog bite?' The fastest ye ever sawed it in yer life; it's goin' to be danced by a professional; 'ma,' waltz him out into the middle of the floor, 'n the first break he makes I'll drop 'im." Jack cocked his gun.

"Ma" waltzed her trembling white-faced pardner out, the fiddler struck up the aforesaid classical air, and the other dancers stopped to see the fun.

"Crack away, 'ma.'"

There was a rush, a wild whirling around and around, a mighty bobbing straight up and down, a jump, a whoop, a mad whirl, a flying of thin black-robed legs in the air. More whirling, bob-

bing, jumping and whooping, and the final drop of a limp breathless man into a chair, where he sat for a moment staring about him and gasping for breath.

"I reckon' that feller won't soon furgit when he danced with 'ma,'" said Jack, as his guest crawled up-stairs to bed.

Mr. Caldwell's mortification did not end here. At the close of services the next Sabbath at the Blue Grass Valley school-house, Asa plucked him aside, and asked :

"Say, ain't you the feller what danced with Misses White at the hoe-down in Wild Cat Holler?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE LEXINGTON DUDES DISPOSED OF.

FOR some time Mr. Flaxseed and Mr. Small-trash seemed to have dropped out of the mind of the family. But they had not. Asa was not near done with them. While Sis indulged the hope that she would never see them again he had no notion to allow as good an opportunity for fun as they afforded him escape so easily.

Asa is not a boy that we would hold up as a sample of a good boy, or a boy after whom all other boys should model. *He was a boy.* Perhaps he was not the ideal boy; and if we hold

Asa up at all as an example, it is as a terrible example and warning to all others not to follow him.

Asa had a bad way of prying about and getting an inkling into other people's affairs. It was all right as long as it was Sis', or pa's, or ma's secrets he was learning; and Asa never eavesdropped anybody else. Through this evil propensity of his, he learned that Mr. Paul Webster, Sis' best beau from Louisville, intended paying a visit to the belle of the Blue Grass Valley the next Sabbath.

Now Asa had made a truce in good faith with Paul, and he intended keeping it to the letter as far as he himself was concerned, but if there was any way to get another thrust at "them Lexington dudes," he was going to do it.

He was not long in forming his opinion as to the course he should pursue. Having ascertained the exact day that Sis' best beau would come, he sat down to his desk—which was a goods box in the attic—and with his pen—which was a lead pencil—he wrote two very humble and apologetic letters, one to each of the Lexington dudes, in which he informed them that he was very sorry for the trick he had played; that Sis had a'most cried her eyes out, an' pa had taken the skin off his back. To each he said that Sis wanted him to come the next Saturday

sure, without fail, but she "would di' 'fore she would say so."

When Mr. Smalltrash received his letter, he had no idea that Mr. Flaxseed had a similar one, and consequently thought that the belle of the Blue Grass Valley was favorable to him. When he was dancing in his room, kicking his heels in the air, he little realized that Mr. Flaxseed was going through a similar process.

By a strange coincidence both resolved at the same time to go, and both did go. A strange coincidence to that they met at the house of their adored.

Asa witnessed the meeting, and was not slow to observe that there was not an excess of brotherly love. We don't know what feelings predominated, but certainly surprise was head and shoulders above every other emotion. Sammy Flaxseed was surprised because Billy Smalltrash was there, and Billy Smalltrash was surprised because Sammy Flaxseed was there, and Paul was surprised at finding them both there, and Sis found herself wondering how they all came there, and the farther we go the more surprised people are, until we come to Asa, who was not surprised at all.

"I tell ye, they're goin' to whoop 'em up," he said to his chum, Tom Thrasher, who had come over at his special invitation to enjoy the fun. "Now, Tom, we've got ter strike while the iron's

hot, ye bet. Don't let 'em git a chance to cool off, but jest keep a whoopin' 'em up. When ever yer with Smalltrash tell him it was Flaxseed what caused the duel, an' for him to stick to him; that he throwed the rotten egg. When yer with the other, jest whoop 'im up, too."

"I'll do it," said Tom.

"'N I'll make it lively, too. Ye see fellers in their condition need a great deal o' encouragement, 'n they'll fly off the handle 'n go back to Lexington.

Sis found she had her hands full to keep down trouble.

"If this is some of Asa's work," the belle of the Blue Grass Valley said to herself, "he has gone a little too far. Why those idiots came here without an invitation is more than I can understand."

Paul Webster asked himself the same question and was almost on the point of asking Clara, when Asa managed to pluck him aside, and said:

"Don't ye mind 'em, Mr. Webster. Jest go in 'n court Sis like a mule a kickin'. Them fellers 'd cut each other's throats 'f they warnt too big cowards. Don't you let them two Lexington dudes worry you."

"But how did they happen to come here to-day?" asked the puzzled Paul. "Did your sister invite them?"

“Naw—invite nuthin’. She never axed ’em to come here’n her life. Sis’ mad as a wet hen ’bout ’t, but she don’t dare let on. Jest go on with yer courtin’, ’n if I don’t show yer more fun ’n the next twenty-four hours ’n ye ever seed ’n yer life, then, say I’m not an expert.”

Paul laughed and decided to let this expert have the management and control of the dudes all to himself. Both he and his chum were getting in their work well. First one and then the other talked with these fellows and kept up their courage, each was assured that the Blue Grass Belle smiled on him.

Sis was never no happy as when strolling about the delightful old farm with her city friends. Paul had grown to love the place second to the girl who walked at his side. He was fond of a stroll among those grand old apple trees.

Sis heard footsteps following them, and glancing back saw the two Lexington dudes.

“Why did those two dunces come here to-day, I would like to know?” she involuntarily asked in her vexation.

“You did not invite them?” said Paul, his heart giving a great joyful bound.

“No, sir ; and if they were gifted with a great amount of human intelligence, they would understand that they were not wanted either. But I

am forced to treat them civil, and hope you will do so."

"Oh, yes, to be sure, Miss Clara," said the bashful Paul, who could well afford to be generous now that he found that the belle of the Blue Grass Valley cared nothing for the simpletons.

"Aw! Miss Clara, beg pawdon," began Mr. Smalltrash, "but I thought I would accompany you—"

"Beg pawdon, beg pawdon, Miss Mullen, but I greatly feah you will be bored," began Flaxseed.

"Oh, no, gentlemen," said Clara, smiling graciously. "I assure you that my friends never bore me. I am always so happy to see them. I hope both you gentlemen are enjoying yourselves."

"Ahem," said Smalltrash.

"Ahem," echoed Flaxseed.

"This is such a delightful day that I am sure you enjoy it; the country air will do your overworked brains good."

"Aw, yes," said Flaxseed.

"To those who have brains," put in Smalltrash, casting a fiery glance at Flaxseed.

"It might cure lunacy, wha' a man goes sniping," retorted Flaxseed, returning the fiery glance.

"Or one who has a hallucination to hunt ba's," retorted Smalltrash.

The dudes were getting nearer to each other,

and Mr. Webster saw those fiery glances, and actually heard them snarl like dogs glowering at each other.

“Snipes !” snapped Flaxseed.

“Ba’s !” bawled Smalltrash.

The dudes were getting nearer to each other, and their eyes were gleaming with all the fury of demons. Their teeth gnashed and they seemed extremely desirous of tearing each other to pieces.

“Oh, gentlemen, gentlemen,” cried Miss Mullen. “Do be careful what you say ; remember where you are.”

“Beg pawdon, Miss Mullen,” said Smalltrash.

“Beg pawdon,” said Flaxseed, bowing very low. “I had almost forgot Miss Mullen, for really when one comes in contact with such infinitesimally small-souled creatures as some by which we are unfortunately surrounded—”

“Yes, Miss Mullen,” and Smalltrash bowed wonderfully low and spoke in a very sarcastic manner. “The presence of ba’ huntah’s, for instance.”

Grinding his teeth with rage Flaxseed turned upon his rival and hissed :

“Snipes !”

“Ba’s !” retorted Smalltrash.

Paul Webster could not restrain his laughter longer. The figure cut by these two dudes was really so ridiculous that a gravestone might have been provoked to laughter.

"You gentlemen seem to be about equal," he said with a smile. "I don't know but you might as well play quits."

The Lexington dudes stood and scowled at each other for several moments, and at last Smalltrash said :

"I have nothing furthah to say."

"Nyther have I," responded his chum and associate. "I have said all there is to say about it, I don't care if Mr. Smalltrash hunts snipes all night."

"Ba's!" cried Smalltrash.

"Snipes!"

It is useless to say that Asa enjoyed the scene, and as for Tom Thrasher, he was lying behind a haystack holding his hands to his sides in a dangerous fit of cramp colic.

That evening Asa managed to see his sister alone a few moments, and said :

"Sis, them two fellers from Lexington 'r goin't stay till Monday."

"Yes, I suppose so," Sis answered, a frown on her pretty brow. "I don't see why they don't go ; I don't want them around here."

"Nor does Paul neither—I guess I'll hev to take 'em in hand, Sis."

"What do you mean, Asa?"

"Well, fact is, Sis, jest this ; Paul's goin' t' pop the question ter ye to-night 'f he can git half a chance. Now I'm solid with them two dudes, 'n

I'm goin to keep'm out'n the way so's to give Paul a show, ye know."

Sis blushed, and Asa continued :

"But, I say, Sis, aint we pretty skace o' beds?"

She knew that Asa had an object in asking the question, and before she could answer he informed her that Tom Thrasher, Joe Diggs, Pete Hodge, and Ike Nichols might conclude to come and stay all night with him, and that there was but one bed for the Lexington dudes. Paul Webster, of course, could have the upstairs east bedroom, and the dudes would have to take the north-west bedroom. Sis assented ; and Asa left with a wink. That evening the weather grew suddenly cold, as it does in the late Autumn, and Asa raised the window of the north-west room to let it air, and, for fear the dudes might suffer from oppressive heat, took away all the heavy bed covers.

He found Sis and Paul in the parlor talking very earnestly. Billy Smalltrash was sitting on the grindstone in the front yard, and Flaxseed was on the fence, both shivering with cold and wishing themselves in Lexington. Both were disgusted with the Blue Grass Valley belle whom they voted a flirt. They had peeped through the window and saw Sis and Paul sitting very close together. That night was very cold and the frost flakes fell about them in abundant

showers. They shivered—for each was dressed more for elegance than comfort.

“Mr. Smalltrash,” said Asa, in a doleful voice as he approached the dude sitting on the grindstone, “I’m ’fraid yer cakes dough’s fur’s Sis ’s concerned.

“Why?” asked Smalltrash, who felt very much as if he had just received a sentence to the Penitentiary.

“Ye know that feller from Louisville who’s bin tryin’ t’ cut ye out, don’t ye?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he’s popped.”

“And what did she do?”

“She flopped.”

It was even so as represented by Asa; she was at that moment lying in the arms of the happy Paul. Poor Billy felt his legs grow weak. They had always looked rather weak. They seemed scarcely able to bear him. Asa supported him to the room set apart for him, and put him to bed.

“Aw, I feel as though I wa’ going to have a chill, my deah boy!” groaned Billy, “let the window down.”

“Wait till I come back.”

Asa was gone, and in a moment was at Sammy Flaxseed’s side. Sammy fell off the fence when he received the stunning intelligence that Sis and the Louisville fellow were betrothed.

Asa helped him to the room set apart for him.

"We've goin' to hev lots o' company to-night," he said, as the dude was ushered into the room, "so 't ye'll hev to sleep two in a bed."

The dudes did not know each other, for it was dark, until both were nestled down in bed. Asa had gone out forgetting to put down the window.

"I beg pawdon, strangah," said Smalltrash, "won't you let down the windah? The boy forget it."

Flaxseed now recognized his enemy.

"You heah?" he cried.

"You heah?" roared Smalltrash.

"Snipes!"

"Ba's!"

A smothered snort was heard at the door and both became silent.

Flaxseed got up to close the window, and Smalltrash took his opportunity to secure most of the cover. Sammy waited until he got to sleep, and then he stole all the cover off of Billy, and, wrapping up snugly, went to sleep. Billy waked up finding himself almost frozen, and took the pains to drag the cover off of his companion and put it on himself. The dudes continued this, alternately sleeping, changing cover, and freezing, until daylight, when both waked at once.

They sat up and looked at each other for a

moment and, as if moved by some inward impulse, they said:

"Sam, forgive me!"

"Bill, forgive me!"

They rose in silence, and silently dressed. Then, gazing helplessly into each other's faces for a few moments, Billy broke the silence by saying:

"Sammy, let's go?"

"Agreed."

They went down stairs, out at the gate in the road and, pausing long enough to shake the dust off their feet, started on foot for Lexington, fully determined never again to be seen in Blue Grass Valley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FEAST SPOILED.

"HELLO, Asa, where ye goin' with that gun?"

"Huntin', Tom; where you goin'?"

"On an errand fur yer pa."

"Pa?"

"Yes."

"What ye goin' to do?"

"Goin' over to Dallyripples 't buy a lamb."

"What the nation 'n Tom Walker d'ye mean?"

Asa took from his shoulder a gun, and sat the



“ ‘You heah?’ he cried; ‘you heah?’ roared Smalltrash.”—
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breach down on the road while he leaned on the barrel. A year has passed since the events in our last chapter. Asa has grown one year older, and "ten years' meaner" according to his pa's way of putting it.

He had met his chum, Tom Thrasher, and the two stood for some moments gazing at each other in silence, while Asa was trying to puzzle his brain to understand why on earth his pa had entrusted Tom with an errand instead of his own dear little boy.

"Tom," said Asa, solemnly.

"What?" Tom answered.

"Tell me all about it."

"Yer pa wanted me to."

"What is it, Tom?"

"Go'n buy him a lamb."

"What in the world does he want a lamb for?"

"Don't ye know he's a goin' to give an old-settlers' dinner here?"

"No; didn't know it," Asa said, shaking his head dubiously. "I've heerd pa speak somethin' 'bout 't too, I b'leve."

Asa had heard of the old-settlers' dinner for some time; in fact he had heard of nothing else. Pa and ma had planned over it, and slept over it, and talked over it, and dreamed over it until at last they had determined to make the old settlers' dinner a practical reality. Asa was just now puzzling his brain to find some way to get even

with his "pa" for his lack of confidence in his skill and judgment in buying a lamb.

"Yer goin' ter buy the lamb fur dinner, are ye?" he asked.

"Yes," Tom answered meekly.

"Now, Tom, I want to ax ye some questions ; serious questions ; 'n I want the rale straight out truth from you."

"What is't, Asa?" asked Tom.

"Will ye tell."

"Yes."

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun."

"Why'd pa send you t' buy the lamb instead o' sendin' me?"

"Wall, I tell ye, Asa," he said in a solemn manner. "Yer pa he said he was afeerd ye'd do some mischief, spend the money fur somethin else, or play some tricks on 'em, an' he wanted me to go to Dallyripple, buy the lamb, 'n hev the dinner, 'n you not know nuthin' 'bout it".

"Fraid I'd do some mischief was he?" said Asa, his brows contracted into a knot.

"Yes, that's what he said."

"Umph, humph—well, I don't know but what there'll be some mischief done anyway."

"No, no, Asa, don't go doin' that ;"

"Oh, I'll fix it all up. You go on to old Dally-ripples, 'n buy the lamb an' come on."

Tom glad to be let off so easily—for he knew

very well the singular disposition of his friend,—went on his way rejoicing. He purchased the lamb of Mr. Dallyripple, and was leading it down the road in triumph, when he met Asa with the gun on his shoulder.

“Come on,” said Asa.

“Well, I will.”

“I’ll help ye lead the lamb.”

There was a rope about its neck, and they led it along very well until they came opposite the house of old Josh Small. Old Josh had a violent temper and was, when roused, sometimes dangerous. Old Josh had a great fondness for dogs. He always had two or three dozen about him, and they were not the most valuable dogs either. There were old dogs and young dogs, big dogs and little dogs. The moment the boys came in sight a chorus of yelps went up in the air, and the dogs began swarming out around them.

“Here; take it,” cried Asa, “and give me the gun.”

Tom caught the string, handing Asa the gun. The frightened lamb jerked the boy almost off his feet, and before he could recover himself the loud report of a gun rang out in the air.

With a sharp yelp, one of the fattest of the pups bounded into the air and fell back dead.

An angry yell came from the house and, as the boys retreated in a body, old Josh Small came

down from the house, through the gate, down to the road, threatening the boys with a club.

"Hold on, Mr. Small, hold on," said Tom, frightened almost out of his wits.

"Take the lamb," said Asa, "It 'll pay fur the dog."

"What 'll I do?" Tommy asked.

"Bring on the pup," said Asa.

The day for the *Old Settlers' Dinner* came. It was the next day after the killing of the dog, and the lamb had been brought in, neatly dressed and cleaned, and Aunt Sukey thought it would make a splendid lamb stew. All the neighbors liked lamb stew, and she was sure that this would please them well.

"'Pears t' me dat dis 'ere lamb's got mighty short legs," said Aunt Sukey. "I nevah saw a lamb so long a body 'n short legs 'n so fat as dis 'ere is; but I guess it 'll make a berry fine stew, any way."

"Sis," said Asa to his sister in the kitchen, "ef I wus you I wouldn't eat at the fust table."

"Why, Asa?"

"Oh, cos it don't look well, that's all."

"Why, Asa, how curious you talk?"

"None o' yer beaux are here ar' they, Sis?"

"I have but one beau and that's Paul, and you know I'm engaged to him, Asa," said Clara, blushing profusely.

"Well, Sis, 't makes no difference what

happens to-day, I want ye to promise me one thing."

"What is that?" she asked.

"That ye won't go back on me."

She promised, and Asa went to the dining-room. He, of course, was uninvited. The guests were assembled around the table; old deacon Fogham had "said a long grace," and every one was busy at the feast. The lamb stew was passed around and to all it had a peculiar flavor. The flesh was very tender and they seemed at a loss to tell whether it was lamb or pork.

"By the way, neighbor," said deacon Fogham, "it seems to me that this has a peculiar taste for lamb. I've et lambs ever since I can remember, but never 'n my life did I taste one like this'n. It may be my taste, though."

"It tastes qua' to me," said old granddaddy Slympole.

"To me, too," put in granny Swarshbuckle.

"'Taint lamb," roared Asa, who stood conveniently near the door.

"What is it?" asked everybody.

"It's a dog. I shot it myself."

Asa's pa made a grab at his boy, but that hopeful son and heir escaped.

CHAPTER XIX.

ASA'S LETTER.

ASA was growing to be a hopeless case. Correction seemed to do him no good. His parents could do nothing with him, and it was decided at last to send him to college. Asa with all his propensity to meanness had a brilliant intellect, and Paul Webster who was soon to become a member of the family by marrying the belle of the Blue Grass Valley, was sure that it would be the very thing to send the youth to college.

Asa had been proscribed ever since the Old Folks' dinner. He had lived a sort of outlawed life ; old deacon Fogham had scoured the woods over, rifle in hand, for the dear little boy, and granddaddy Smarshbuckle swore to shoot him at first sight. Something must be done with Asa to prevent a first-class murder trial.

So that was why his " pa " decided to take him to college. He smuggled him along the road one dark night to the station, boarded the train with his dear little boy, and the next morning they were in Louisville. Asa had never been in a larger town than Tick Hill, Lick-Skillet and the Station before, and Louisville, to him, seemed huge. His pa was to stay with his dear little boy until he got started in, to see that he did not get homesick.

Asa wrote his sister a letter in which he describes Louisville, and especially the effect it had upon his "pa." As we have been able to procure a copy of that letter we here give it entire :

"LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY.

"November 18th, 18—

"Dear Sis :

"You may put ma in too, if you want to, but as I'm writin' this letter to you, I thought I'd say you. Well, we got here all safe, but I don't know how we done it. It seems to me that any one who could git here can go almost anywhere. Well, Sis, this is a purty nice town, but it's too far away from Blue Grass Valley to ever amount to much. I saw yer beau Paul, an' he's as good as pie to pa 'n me. He took us to the theatre last night. You don't know what that is, of course. Well, pa, he don't want it known in the Valley that he went, cos ye see, Sis, there was sights at that theatre. Thar was a railin' runnin' all round at one end, an' above it riz a high floor an' great big curtains, bigger 'n a dozen bed quilts, rolled up 'n down. Thar was men settin' in that railin' a fiddlin' like they war at a dance, an' ye know pa don't go to dances at home.

"Well, a big feller came out 'n screamed an' yelled in sich a awful way that two or three other people came out on that big floor an' all

got into a fight over a gal. Pa, he got his dander up, 'n he wanted to go 'n hev a hand, but some one told him not to, fur it was all in the play—well, after they got 'em all quieted down, them fiddlers begin fiddlin' agin, an' pa he kept a pattin' his foot, though I told him it didn't look well fur as old a man as he, an' one who was a church-member, to be pattin' his foot fur a dance. Well, d'rectly, a whole passel o' gals, with slippers, long white stockin's an' spider-web dresses came out 'n danced. They could beat anything in Wild Cat Holler. An' sich kickin'. I though pa'd take a fit, he laughed so much. One's shoe came off 'n hit pa on the nose. Well, pa don't want anything said 'bout this to ma, so 'f you read this letter to her ye can skip this part.

“I was goin' with pa down the street next day, an' they've got men an' women made out o' rocks, an' wood, an' iron standin' by the side of the stores, holdin' out their hands. Well, ye know pa can't see very well when he ain't got his specks on, an' so, when he saw one o' these wooden people, he stepped right up, took hold o' his hand 'n said :

“Why, howdy do? I ain't seed yer fur long time. When was ye down on Blue Grass Valley last?”

“I told pa he was mistaken ; that this man hed never bin down thar, but he told me to shet my

mouth, that he was the very man to whom he sold the horses last summer, an' went on t' ax him if he had driv' a purty good bargain. Well, as the feller wouldn't talk back, pa soon begin to see that he was mistaken, an' so he apologized, an' we went on.

"I jest declare, Sis, I am ashamed o' pa. He's entirely too free. He won't mind a word I say, an' yesterday, as we were goin' through some rale purty woods called a park, we saw a deer lyin' down chawin' terbacker, an' he wanted me t' stay thar 'n watch it, while he ran to the house fur a gun ; but a big man who had on a blue coat 'n brass buttons came up 'n told pa they'd jug him if he hurt that deer. Though pa likes a jug purty well ye know, he didn't seem to want to be jugged, 'n so he went away. Well, they've got street kears here. They're a house on wheels, an' it takes two horses to pull 'em. Whenever we go ridin' on these kears pa wants to drive. Says he always drives at home. They hev to pay five cents for ridin' on them kears, an' when the man who jingles the bell because it makes him so glad to git a nickle come round to pa, he told him that next time he came to Blue Grass Valley he'd take him ridin' in his wagin' to pay back fur this ride. The feller got mad, an' cursed and swore that pa 'd either pay or git off. Pa never could stand it to hev anybody cuss, so he paid, an' at the next street we got off.

“ Well, they’ve got me in the college. Not the rale college they say. They call it the preparitory ; but I don’t see any sense ’n that, coz it’s all one building, an’ I prepared to come afore I came. Paul Webster he comes over ever once in a while, an’ was tickled mighty nigh to death when he heard one o’ the teachers say I was a rale smart boy. Paul’s a rale good feller, Sis ; but when ye marry him ye’ll hev to jest watch out cos he’s got a temper. He can’t stand nuthin’. I went to meetin’ with him one night, an’, Sis, they’ve got the biggest meetin’ houses here ye ever seed. Why, one’s bigger’n our last winter’s ole straw pile. Then the benches are made out o’ wood on one side ’n rag on tother, ’n as soft as any bed ye ever laid down on to sleep ’n yer life. Well, it was so good settin thar ’n the preacher he talked kinder drowsy like, ’n I went to sleep. They said I snored so’s the people couldn’t hear the preacher. It made Paul mad, ’n he shook me considerably. Wall, it woke me up, ’n he told me to stay awake. I think a feller that ’ud do that’s got a temper. Well, Sis, I aint got much to write ; they give me a whole passel o’ buks to read, ’n slate an’ pencil t’ cipher. They haven’t got me a pair o’ roller skates, nor a pocket pistol, ’n o’ course I can’t be happy ; but I’m goin’ to try to live through it. Pa’s goin’ home ’n a day or two, ’n I guess then, maybe, I kin git out a little

'n hev some fun. Don't tell ma how her dear little boy's pinin' away. Has ole deacon Fogham et another dog since I left?

“Good bye,

“Asa.”

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

EVERYTHING must have an end, and so must this narrative. We don't know whether the reader will part with Asa willingly or reluctantly. We suppose it depends more on the make-up of the reader than the story ; as it usually does. If the man who reads this is a good-hearted, whole-souled jolly fellow, who throws in big when the contribution box is passed around, who helps a fellow in trouble, enjoys a good hearty laugh and thinks there is no harm in fun, he will part with Asa Mullen reluctantly. But if the reader is a straight-jacket, a narrow-minded, small-souled, fault-finding, high-pressure moral man, who always takes more than legal interest, who can talk about the sins of the world, and swindle a widow or an orphan, he will throw Asa Mullen aside, and call it trash and demoralizing stuff. But we don't care a fig for your criticism. All the good books published were pronounced bad by critics, until the world had found out they were worth their

weight in gold, and these self-same critics came to the front to laud them to the skies. A fool and a critic are not synonymous, but they are relatives.

It is a bright day in summer, and the Mullen homestead, in Blue Grass Valley, is adorned in all its glory, for this is a festive occasion. The richest garb of summer has been assumed by all the ornamental and shade trees. Flowers of a thousand shades and hues bloom all over the yard. The house itself has been converted into a veritable flower garden. The old broad fireplace has been massed with banks of roses. Sis's pretty little linnet sings gaily in his new cage, and a happy throng is assembling. There are ladies dressed in almost every sort of costume, from the yellow calico of "Wild Cat Holler," to the silks, satins, and diamonds of Louisville. 89

All formality seems to have been laid in the Asa's improvement at college has been immense. He is through in division and has learned that "John is a noun." He knows that the earth is round, and that Louisville is in Kentucky. Of course he has not graduated, but he winks his eye, and says :

"I'll git thar eli', be gosh."

Rev. Caldwell is also present to officiate in the coming ceremony, assisted by Rev. John Culbertson. It is useless to say that these men have forgiven Asa, for forgiveness is their trade.

A preacher who can't forgive is no good. He must forgive his people if they lie on him, if they go to sleep in meeting. He must forgive them if they miss coming. He must forgive them if they slip and fall (morally, we mean), and if they owe him a salary for going through rain and snow and cold and heat, he must forgive the debt, or the biggest part of it,—at least, he usually has to do so. So of course these good men forgave Asa, and laid up no grudge against him.

He was like all other boys, "just a little bit bad."

Of course the reader knows what's going to happen. There is great "carryings on" at the Mullen homestead. Aunt Sukey is in the back kitchen hard at work. She has on her best clothes too, for though she is cooking a grand dinner for this great assembly, she is ready to go in the minute they "stand up." Asa, notwithstanding it is his sister's wedding day, is far more interested in one pot that is boiling, than the coming nuptials. In that pot is sheep's-head and dumplings—Asa's favorite dish. He is telling Aunt Sukey to be very careful, for he is hungry.

At this moment the whisper goes all over the premises that now it's going to be done. Aunt Sukey quits the pots, and wiping her hands, hastens with the other darkies into the large

front room, where the guests are all awaiting the solemn ceremonies. Sis, the Belle of the Blue Grass Valley, looks prettier than ever in her pale blue silk *en la traine*—and bribal veil. Paul is proud as he takes her hand to become her lawful and wedded husband. Oh, the solemnity of that hour as the good man proceeds with the ceremonies. Even the little bird ceases his song and all hearts seem stilled. Only the low, solemn voice of the man of God breaks the silence. The air is laden with the perfume of flowers, and a quiet, glorious happiness on this summer's day seems to pervade the atmosphere.

All have risen, and the man of God raises his hands and begins to pray, when the well-known voice of Asa could be heard at the door.

“Ma—ma—ma, come here?”

Ma she looked up from between her hands and began to wink and nod to drive Asa away or silence him for a few moments; but Asa persevered.

“Ma—oh, ma,” he called, each time getting louder.

She again resorted to a system of winks and nods, when he, out of all patience, cried:

“Ye needn’t stand thar a winkin’ and blinkin’ all day, for I be durned ’f the ram’s head aint buttin’ all the dumplin’s ’n the fire.”

Aunt Sukey understood that the dumplings were boiling out, and hastened to their rescue.

Asa was once more at his ease, for there was enough saved for his dinner.

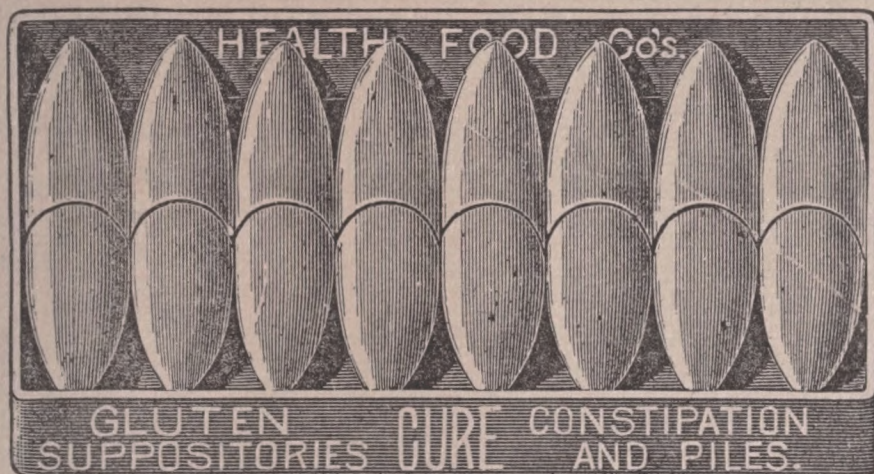
The ceremony was of course completed, and the sweet Clara Mullen became the wife of the really noble but bashful Paul Webster.

Asa never graduated. The president of the college said he thought if they were able to change faculties every six months he might get through, but that human life was too precious to attempt to graduate him. He's at home once more; and the great question which now agitates Blue Grass Valley, is not how to solve the negro problem, nor who is to be the American novelist, nor whether the American Republic is doomed, but what is to become of "Asa Mullen, The Worst Boy Alive."

THE END.

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